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HOUSE
CONCURRENT RESOLUTION
No. 88

Originated in House  Clerk

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 88

A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION WELCOMING DR. RODNEY D. BENNETT TO THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI AND CONGRATULATING HIM ON BEING NAMED THE TENTH PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI.

WHEREAS, on February 7, 2013, the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning concluded a nationwide search for the next president of the University of Southern Mississippi with the announcement of its unanimous decision in the selection of the institution's tenth president in the school's 103-year history: Dr. Rodney D. Bennett; and

WHEREAS, the naming of Dr. Bennett as the next President of USM was the culmination of a two-day visit with students, faculty, staff, alumni and community members at the school's Hattiesburg and Gulf Park campuses during which Dr. Bennett's broad experience in higher education and his commitment to helping students, the community and entire region to succeed was readily apparent; and

WHEREAS, currently the Vice President for Student Affairs at the University of Georgia, a position to which he ascended since arriving at the Athens school in 2001 to serve as Dean of

Students, Dr. Bennett, open and approachable, is highly regarded as having a tremendous depth of knowledge of all facets of higher education and a student-centered approach that is personable and focused on students excelling in the classroom and beyond; and

WHEREAS, selected by the college board for his leadership abilities, Dr. Bennett, so aptly described by IHL Board President Ed Blakeslee as, "the right person to lead the university at this time," will create history when he assumes the USM presidency by becoming the first African American to head a predominantly white public university in the state; and

WHEREAS, founded as Mississippi Normal College, a teacher training school, on March 30, 1910, before being renamed State Teachers College in 1924 and Mississippi Southern College in 1940, the University of Southern Mississippi is a resilient institution that has developed a toughness and resolve by overcoming adversity, including more than one legislative attempt to close the school's doors, throughout its storied history; and

WHEREAS, within days after returning to Athens after being tapped to lead USM, when the school was faced, yet again, with adversity after much of the Hattiesburg campus and Hub City was ripped apart by a tornado that left at least six campus buildings facing extensive damage initially estimated at totaling \$20 - \$30 million, Dr. Bennett demonstrated compassion and a firm commitment to his new USM family when he swiftly returned to the community, although he had not yet worked a day on campus, in a show of

support and to join countless students, faculty and staff who shortened their break to assist in the clean-up efforts; and

WHEREAS, humbled and enthusiastic about the opportunity to lead the school of over 16,000 students to new and greater heights of success, Dr. Bennett, a man of integrity recognized for having a "God-given talent for relating to people," is focused on helping the University of Southern Mississippi literally achieve its often heard aspiration of moving USM "to the top"; and

WHEREAS, originally from Knoxville, Tennessee, Dr. Bennett earned several degrees from Middle Tennessee University, including a bachelor of science in mass communication, a specialist in education and a master of education in educational administration, before being awarded a doctor of education degree in educational administration from Tennessee State University in Nashville; and

WHEREAS, although Dr. Bennett has not officially begun the era of his USM leadership, the City of Hattiesburg, a progressive city that is a center of culture and diversity, enthusiastically looks forward to welcoming Dr. Bennett and his wife of over 20 years, Temple Bennett, and their two teenage daughters to the community; and

WHEREAS, as Dr. Bennett prepares to assume the presidency of USM this spring, it is only fitting that we respectfully acknowledge this important occasion in the history of the University of Southern Mississippi and the State of Mississippi:

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI, THE SENATE CONCURRING THEREIN, That we do hereby congratulate Dr. Rodney D. Bennett on being named the tenth President of the University of Southern Mississippi and extend to him and his family our heartiest welcome to the USM family, the City of Hattiesburg and the entire State of Mississippi.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That copies of this resolution be furnished to Dr. Rodney D. Bennett, the University of Southern Mississippi, the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning and to the members of the Capitol Press Corps.

ADOPTED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
March 14, 2013



SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ADOPTED BY THE SENATE
March 22, 2013



PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE

