

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 198

BY SENATORS CORTEZ, ABRAHAM, ALLAIN, BARROW, BERNARD, BOUDREAUX, BOUIE, CARTER, CATHEY, CLOUD, CONNICK, DUPLESSIS, FESI, FIELDS, FOIL, HARRIS, HENRY, HENSGENS, HEWITT, JACKSON, KLEINPETER, LAMBERT, LUNEAU, MCMATH, MILLIGAN, FRED MILLS, ROBERT MILLS, MIZELL, MORRIS, PEACOCK, POPE, PRICE, REESE, SMITH, STINE, TALBOT, TARVER, WHITE AND WOMACK

A RESOLUTION

To commend Debra Russell for her many years of dedicated public service to the state of Louisiana, in particular, her forty-four years of loyal commitment and service to the Louisiana Senate and to congratulate her upon the occasion of her well-deserved retirement.

WHEREAS, Debra Russell has been a fixture at the Louisiana State Capitol and has provided exemplary service to the Senate for over forty-four years, beginning her career at the capitol in 1979, after a two-year stint in the executive branch; and

WHEREAS, she served under the leadership of nine Senate Presidents, including Michael H. O'Keefe, Samuel B. Nunez Jr., Allen R. Bares, Randy Ewing, John J. Hainkel Jr., Donald E. Hines, M.D., Joel T. Chaisson II, John A. Alario Jr., and Patrick "Page" Cortez; and

WHEREAS, with her affable demeanor and unforgettable, joyful laugh, Debra embodies the essence of an ideal legislative staffer and a devoted public servant, and the example she set will carry on for years to come by those who had the pleasure and honor of working with her; and

WHEREAS, Debra is the second of six children, and the only daughter, born to Joseph Canale and Anginette Garafola Canale of Independence, Louisiana; and

WHEREAS, being raised with her five brothers, she learned early in life from her mother how to raise a family and put the needs of others before her own, and these qualities, which Debra personifies, contributed to the formation of many sincere and rich relationships, both professional and personal; and

WHEREAS, in May of 1977, she graduated from Independence Girls High School in Independence, Louisiana, and later that year, on August 6, 1977, she married the love of her life, Richard Russell; and

WHEREAS, on April 2, 1979, Debra began her illustrious career and life's work at the Louisiana Senate; and

WHEREAS, it was under the tutelage of Sylvia Duke that Debra mastered the numerous responsibilities that she was entrusted to perform throughout her career; and

WHEREAS, Debra Russell, Sylvia Duke, and Beverly Walton, the Senate's former dietician and chef, through their devoted service to the Louisiana Senate, became the best of friends, and the trio enjoyed working side-by-side through the long, hard days of session and loved traveling together outside of work to visit beautiful homes and destinations throughout the United States with Debra as their driver; and

WHEREAS, it was in 1988 that Debra's "work husband" arrived at the state capitol, and over the last thirty-five years, they became known as "Cliff and Debra"; far too many times to count, together they seamlessly accomplished, what seemed nearly impossible to most, behind-the-scene projects that improved the quality and function of the Senate; and

WHEREAS, Debra would describe her job as "light bulbs and toilets", but that description does not even scratch the surface of her numerous contributions to the Senate, including members and staff; and

WHEREAS, Debra's duties include but are in no way limited to meeting the needs of thirty-nine Senators and numerous staff on a daily basis; ensuring sockets, lights, and lamps have working electricity; packing and painting offices and moving furniture in the capitol, and then re-packing and re-painting offices and re-moving furniture over and over again; potting plants and exterminating rodents, snakes, and ants; coordinating general maintenance and housekeeping of the Senate areas of the Louisiana State Capitol, Capitol Annex, and Pentagon Barracks buildings with various state agencies as well as coordinating maintenance and construction projects on the same properties with buildings and grounds personnel and private contractors; maintaining inventory for all Senate property, including property located in each of the thirty-nine Senate district offices; alerting members and staff to freshly steamed and cleaned carpet by strategically placing bright orange construction

cones; keeping stock of ample supplies of water, juices, soda and creamers, sugars, and honey for the pots of fresh, hot coffee; and providing necessary amenities to members and staff, including an endless candy jar during session, medicine to cure a myriad of ailments, toothbrushes, Neosporin, and Band-aids; and

WHEREAS, a typical day for Debra could begin with cleaning toilets; in the afternoon, she could be setting up a lunch for Senators and their guests; and then late in the evening, she could be removing carpet from a hallway where one of the toilets that she cleaned that morning overflowed; and

WHEREAS, Debra's talents and abilities transcended the seasons as she played a vital role in beautifully decorating the state capitol for Christmas and special events, including inauguration; and

WHEREAS, she has left an indelible mark on this body's rich history in the halls and on the walls of the Senate, from the placement of artifacts and paintings and the Louisiana state seal as carpet medallions, to the pictures of presidents of the Senate and the numerous framed collages of Senate members and their families and Senate staff, past and present; and

WHEREAS, the love that Debra has for her very large but tight-knit family is no secret, and since the passing of her mother in 1997, Debra became the matriarch of her family and never misses a birthday or a special event involving her immediate family; and

WHEREAS, Debra and Richard have one daughter, Brittany, and there is no question that she is the apple of their eye; being able to work closely with her daughter and best friend on a daily basis from 2007 to 2023 was one of the greatest joys of Debra's life and will be a memory she will cherish forever; and

WHEREAS, it was to Debra's office that many staff ran when they needed a listening ear from a friend, sound advice on a matter, a strong shoulder to cry on, or a cheerleader to celebrate an engagement, a new baby, or any piece of good news; and

WHEREAS, in retirement, Debra plans to spend time with her family, including her precious grandsons, Benjamin and Samuel, who affectionately call her "Nonna", attend family gatherings, including the annual Canale Christmas, and watch Benjamin and Samuel play sports anywhere and everywhere, and she looks forward to reminiscing with friends she holds dear; and

WHEREAS, when not enjoying family time, Debra enjoys "everything LSU" including attending Bengal Belles events, Tiger tailgates and games, and watching the Lady Tigers play basketball, a tradition handed down from her mother who kept clippings of the then up-and-coming, Kim Mulkey, a 5'4" hometown hero who started her basketball career at a middle school in Tickfaw, Louisiana; and

WHEREAS, to her Senate family, Debra's retirement came too early and the workplace will never be the same, as we will miss the tremendous difference her friendship, support, and love meant to us, including all the wonderful moments with her, especially the humor and chats that she so lovingly shared with so many of us, and it is with love and sincerest gratitude, that Senators and staff wish Debra Russell all the best in her future endeavors.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby commend Debra Russell on her many years of dedicated public service to the state of Louisiana, in particular, her forty-four years of loyal commitment and service to the Louisiana Senate and congratulate her upon the occasion of her well-deserved retirement.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be transmitted to Debra Russell.

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PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE