

2021 Regular Session

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 119

BY SENATOR MIZELL

CONDOLENCES. Expresses condolences on the death of Earl Michael Willis.

1 A RESOLUTION

2 To express the sincere condolences of the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana upon the
3 death of Earl Michael Willis.

4 WHEREAS, it is with deep regret and profound sorrow that the members of the
5 Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana have learned of the passing of Earl "Michael" Willis
6 on May 16, 2021, at age twenty-seven; and

7 WHEREAS, Theodore Roosevelt wrote that "Far better it is to dare mighty things,
8 to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure than to rank with those poor
9 spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in a gray twilight that
10 knows no victory nor defeat ..."; and

11 WHEREAS, to anyone who ever met Michael Willis, these words described his life
12 to the fullest as he lived more completely during his twenty-seven years of life than most
13 people live in a whole lifetime; and

14 WHEREAS, Earl Michael Willis, the beloved son of Earl Raymond and Cristal
15 Leblanc Willis, was born on May 29, 1993 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and

16 WHEREAS, Michael grew up in West Baton Rouge Parish, in his small hometown
17 of Brusly, Louisiana, attended Holy Family School in Port Allen from Kindergarten to 8th
18 grade, and graduated from Catholic High School in Baton Rouge; and

1 WHEREAS, being reared in a small, close knit community, the tremendous influence
2 of his parents, and his catholic schooling, Michael developed a strong and relentless faith
3 and belief in God; his Christian faith and values were part of his everyday life; and

4 WHEREAS, Michael lived and breathed a love and devotion for the Heavenly Father
5 and his faith was cemented through his friendship with Father Michael Allelo, who Michael
6 loved not only as a spiritual guidepost but his cherished friend; and

7 WHEREAS, it is said that there are a few events in a person's life that characterize
8 their entire life, such was the case with Michael for when he was in middle school, his older
9 sister, Rachael Lynn, was diagnosed with cancer and at the age of twenty-four passed away
10 from cancer; and

11 WHEREAS, Michael was fourteen years old at the time of Rachael Lynn's passing
12 and since then, he did much to honor her memory and pay tribute, love, and devotion to his
13 older sister; and

14 WHEREAS, he and his family participated in many Light the Night events organized
15 by the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, and recently, Michael and his wife, Megan,
16 established a nonprofit foundation named Running for Rachael; and

17 WHEREAS, in December 2018, Michael set a personal goal of raising \$25,000 for
18 cancer research and to run a 100-mile marathon to honor the memory of his sister; and

19 WHEREAS, on Sunday, May 16, 2021, prior to his untimely death, Michael reached
20 part of his goal as he successfully completed the Key 100 Ultra Marathon in Key West,
21 Florida, running one hundred miles, at a pace of twelve minutes/mile and completed the race
22 after running twenty hours and twenty-nine minutes, placing tenth overall, sixth in male
23 (overall) and first in his age division; one of one hundred ninety-nine runners, he finished
24 ninety-fifth; and

25 WHEREAS, Michael had a tremendous passion for advocacy which began while
26 working as a high schooler at River Road Day Care, in Port Allen, his entire adulthood was
27 devoted to advocating for causes that were important to him; and

28 WHEREAS, during the summer of 2014, Michael worked as an intern for the
29 American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons in their Washington DC office and also as an
30 intern for Congressman Bill Cassidy in his Washington, DC office; and

1 WHEREAS, for a Louisiana boy who had spent each summer fishing in Grand Isle,
2 he truly missed spending the summer in Louisiana yet, he had made a commitment to
3 working full-time as an intern in DC to gain more experience and knowledge; and

4 WHEREAS, from February 2014 until August 2017, Michael served as the Director
5 of Business Development for Cindy Bishop at Checkmate Strategies, an association
6 management and lobbying firm headquartered in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where he became
7 a registered lobbyist and advocated for issues on behalf of physicians, justices of the peace
8 and constables, athletic trainers, school-based health clinics, child care centers, and the meat
9 processors; and he conducted workshops on how to advocate in the nonprofit sector; and

10 WHEREAS, he graduated from Louisiana State University in May 2015 with a
11 Bachelor of Science degree in Political Science; during his time at LSU, Michael was an
12 active member of the Phi Kappa Psi Fraternity serving as President of the Pledge Class,
13 Chaplain, and Head of the Judicial Board; and

14 WHEREAS, from September 2017 until January 2020, Michael served as the South
15 Louisiana Field Representative for Congressman Ralph Abraham and traveled the state to
16 help constituents from East and West Feliciana parishes to Washington Parish to St. Helena
17 and Tangipahoa parishes; and

18 WHEREAS, as Vice President of Policy for The Center for Development and
19 Learning, he led CDL's very successful "Literacy and Economic Development" Summit on
20 April 7, 2021, planned and led a highly successful "Literacy Day at the Capitol" on May 6,
21 had begun to plan for a series of regional conversations on the intersection of literacy and
22 economic development to begin in September and take place throughout the state and, at the
23 time of his sudden and untimely passing, he was working on important early literacy issues;
24 and

25 WHEREAS, on April 17, 2020, Michael married the love of his life, Megan Voda,
26 and they certainly define love conquers all as they had a connection unlike any other; and

27 WHEREAS, they laughed together, inspired each other, and challenged one another
28 to grow, both collectively and individually; they respected each other's aspirations,
29 conquering them together as one; and

30 WHEREAS, their marriage occurred at the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic,

1 so their wedding was not what they had planned but was exactly what they deserved; a day
2 full of love and pure joy with the people that meant the most to them; and

3 WHEREAS, his love and devotion for his mom Cristal, his dad "King Earl", his
4 cousins Tessa and Lacey, his beloved nephews Beau and Harrison, his nieces Lilly and
5 Caroline, his half-brother Nicholas, his sister-in-law Katie Voda, his mother-in-law Cris
6 Voda, his father-in-law Tim Voda and his many uncles, aunts and cousins was
7 immeasurable; and

8 WHEREAS, spending quality time with his beloved wife Megan, his loyal and
9 dedicated friends, and his loving family was always at the top of Michael's priority list; his
10 parents taught Michael family values and showed him unconditional love; his mother taught
11 him the value of service to his community and others; and his father Earl instilled in Michael
12 a profound love and appreciation of Louisiana's culture, especially fishing and hunting; and

13 WHEREAS, Michael was preceded in death by his sister, Rachael Willis; paternal
14 grandparents, Mildred Ourso Willis Burleigh and Ferrel Lee Willis; maternal grandparents,
15 Julia and Claiborne Simoneaux; and his beloved dog, Colonel; and

16 WHEREAS, he is survived by his wife Megan; parents Earl and Cristal Willis;
17 brother Nicholas Boudreaux; nephews, Noah and Nicholas Boudreaux; mother and father
18 in-law Cris and Tim Voda; sister-in-law Katie Voda; aunts Chenny LeBlanc, Brandon and
19 Kay Willis, Skip and Andrea Cleveland, Claiborne Simoneaux Jr., and Stephanie Palmer;
20 and numerous cousins including Lacey Ellis (Bob) and Tessa Danna (Patrick); and
21 "honorary" nieces and nephews Beau and Lilly Seymour, Caroline and Harrison Danna; and
22 his beloved dog Huey; and

23 WHEREAS, Michael Willis was loving, inspiring, motivational, sweet, positive, one
24 of-a kind, perpetually upbeat, fun, someone with a heart of gold, and an incredible man who
25 made people feel loved, valued, and appreciated; and

26 WHEREAS, while Michael's accomplishments in his twenty-seven years were many,
27 he is most remembered for his big smile, larger than life personality, bear hugs, and his
28 devotion to his wife, family, and his faith were an inspiration to all those he met.

29 THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana
30 does hereby express sincere condolences upon the death of Earl Michael Willis, does hereby

1 extend heartfelt sympathies to his family, and does hereby recognize that the memories of
2 this extraordinary man shall live forever in the minds and hearts of all who knew and loved
3 him.

4 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be transmitted to
5 Earl Michael Willis' wife, Megan Willis.

The original instrument and the following digest, which constitutes no part
of the legislative instrument, were prepared by Jerry J. Guillot.

	DIGEST	
SR 119 Original	2021 Regular Session	Mizell
Expresses condolences upon the death of Earl Michael Willis.		