

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 92

BY SENATOR FIELDS

A RESOLUTION

To express sincere condolences upon the passing of Johnnie A. Jones Sr. and to gratefully acknowledge his extraordinary career of public service on behalf of the citizens of Louisiana.

WHEREAS, Johnnie A. Jones Sr. was a uniquely talented civil rights lawyer and decorated veteran who provided many decades of public service to his beloved Louisiana; and

WHEREAS, his storied legacy began in Laurel Hill, Louisiana, where Johnnie A. Jones was born November 30, 1919, to a family of local farmers on Rosemound Plantation, and though his parents stressed the importance of education, they also instilled in him the value of hard work; and

WHEREAS, Johnnie worked hard to earn the \$17.50 tuition to attend high school at Southern University Demonstration School, which was later named Southern University Lab School, and after graduating, he went on to major in industrial education at Southern University, and in 1942, he was drafted by the United States Army where he became the Army's first African-American warrant officer assigned to a unit responsible for unloading equipment and supplies onto the Normandy beaches in France; and

WHEREAS, during the June 6, 1944, invasion as Jones came ashore on Omaha Beach, he came under fire from a German sniper, he grabbed his weapon, returned fire, and this became a memory that haunted him all his life; he continued to exhibit bravery as he served his country; thereafter, a ship that he was stationed on hit a mine and Johnnie was blown from the second deck to the first deck; it was during this attack he was hit with shrapnel and badly injured; and

WHEREAS, by the end of World War II, more than a million African Americans were in uniform including the famed Tuskegee Airmen and the 761st Tank Battalion, but these heroes returned from the war only to encounter discrimination in their home country; and

WHEREAS, these events served as a call to action to fight racism in which Johnnie obtained a law degree from Southern University Law School, was recruited in 1953 to be the spokesperson for the NAACP, and helped organize a bus boycott in Baton Rouge and defend the participants; an event used by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as the basis for a larger bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, several years later; and

WHEREAS, in his law practice Jones provided legal aid to students arrested during sit-ins; defended the Southern University students who staged the lunch counter protest at the Kress department store in downtown Baton Rouge, and he helped desegregate the courthouse; and

WHEREAS, in his quest to obtain equality for African Americans in the United States, Jones' vehicle was bombed twice, but he persevered and was an active participant in the social justice movement that would widely impact future generations; and

WHEREAS, Jones' many accolades include the Sign Post To Freedom award from the Odell S. Williams Museum/Sadie Roberts Joseph; a special recognition from Governor John Bel Edwards; SAVE BR Youth Prayer Movement; Taking A Seat For Justice-Award of Excellence; Southern University National Lawyers Guild, Pillar Award; Chairman Award, Civil Rights Icon, Louisiana Legislative Black Caucus Foundation; Louis A. Martinet Society, Lifetime Achievement; the Louisiana Black History Hall of Fame; and Baton Rouge Chapter of The Links, Louisiana Role Model; and

WHEREAS, in 2020, the French government presented Johnnie A. Jones Sr. with the Legion of Honor award for his World War II service and though it took decades for Jones' sacrifice and courage during World War II to be recognized, in 2021 at the age of one hundred one, he finally received his Purple Heart, which is awarded to U.S. service members killed or wounded in action; and

WHEREAS, Johnnie A. Jones Sr. was a man who lived an exceptional life and the value of his service to his country and to his state cannot be measured.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby express sincere and heartfelt condolences to the family of Johnnie A. Jones Sr. and does gratefully acknowledge his extraordinary career of military service and dedication to civil rights.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be transmitted to the family of Johnnie A. Jones Sr.

PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE