

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 205

BY SENATOR FOIL

A RESOLUTION

To express the sincere and heartfelt condolences of the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana on behalf of its members, past and present, and on behalf of the citizens of the state of Louisiana to the family of George Lee Griffin Sr., a pioneer of the banking industry, public servant, philanthropist, and dedicated family man on the occasion of his passing on June 8, 2023.

WHEREAS, George Lee Griffin Sr. was born in Leavenworth, Kansas, on September 19, 1938, and grew up in Dallas, Texas, where he was a standout football player and All-American diver at Highland Park High School, and he graduated with honors in economics from the University of Texas at Austin, where he was a member of the diving team and Phi Delta Theta fraternity; and

WHEREAS, after graduation, Lee intended to join the Navy as a "frogman" which was the precursor to the SEALS, but failed the physical due to a high school football injury; and

WHEREAS, despondent after the Navy's rejection, Lee sought advice from his favorite professor, who recommended that he attend graduate school at Louisiana State University (LSU), where Lee met his best friend for life and beautiful wife of sixty years, Elizabeth Barrett "Barrie" Lobdell; and

WHEREAS, after earning his master's degree in economics from LSU in 1962, Lee planned to return to Dallas as he had a lucrative offer from a prestigious investment firm, but Barrie's father, a former LSU quarterback and student body president, refused to give his blessing of Lee's proposal of marriage to Barrie unless she graduated from LSU; and

WHEREAS, Lee then accepted an offer to join the management training program at Louisiana National Bank (LNB), and he started his remarkable life in business and community and public service in Baton Rouge; and

WHEREAS, in the 1960s and 1970s, as a young executive, Lee was instrumental in

LNB's decisions to introduce programs and technologies that most banks in the South did not embrace for years, such as drive-through tellers, residential loans, the first automated teller machine (ATM) in Louisiana, banking by telephone, home banking which later became online banking, debit cards, and credit cards; and

WHEREAS, Lee played a pioneering role in the worldwide credit card revolution, by convincing Bank of America, later VISA, to grant LNB the first Louisiana franchisee agreement for their BankAmericard, which was the first national credit card; and

WHEREAS, while still in his mid-thirties, he was elected to the board of directors in 1975, where he would serve for the next twenty years; Lee is credited by his contemporaries with coming up with the name VISA, when BankAmericard expanded into other countries; and

WHEREAS, in making a name for himself in the international financial services sector, Lee was steadily rising through the ranks at LNB, and he was named president at the age of thirty-nine; and

WHEREAS, as president of LNB and the Louisiana Bankers' Association, in the 1980s, Lee convinced the legislature to legalize statewide banking, and subsequently created the first statewide bank through a series of mergers that resulted in Premier Bank; and

WHEREAS, while serving as president, chief executive officer, and chair of the board at Premier, Lee got ahead of the national banking trend in the 1990s, by brokering the deal for Bank One of Ohio to purchase Premier, thus creating the first interstate bank in Louisiana, with Lee serving as Bank One Louisiana's first president and chief executive officer; and

WHEREAS, while Lee was always interested in community and public service, after being elected as the president of the Committee of 100; when the legislature created the Select Council on Revenue and Expenditures in Louisiana's Future, known as the SECURE Council, composed of legislators, government officials, business leaders, educators, and students, Lee was selected to lead this endeavor as chairman; and

WHEREAS, for two years, the SECURE Council conducted an extensive study of Louisiana government at all levels, and was charged to "develop recommendations to improve the financial future of the state and the general quality of life of its citizens" with

the council's recommendations saving the state four billion dollars over the next ten years; and

WHEREAS, upon retirement from banking, Lee was appointed by Governor Murphy J. "Mike" Foster to the Civil Service Commission, and was reappointed by governors Kathleen Blanco, Bobby Jindal, and John Bel Edwards; and

WHEREAS, in the 2000s, Lee agreed to come out of retirement to serve as president and chief executive officer of the LSU Foundation; Lee laid the groundwork for the "Fierce for the Future" capital campaign and developed the LSU Gateway Project on Nicholson Drive; and

WHEREAS, throughout his life, Lee gave back to the community by serving on numerous philanthropic boards, and he was instrumental in the creation of St. James Place retirement community as its first board chair; and

WHEREAS, a devout Christian and man of deep faith, Lee served his church, St. James Episcopal, in various capacities, including school board president, investment committee chair, chairing capital campaigns, and multiple terms on the vestry, serving as Junior and Senior Warden on many occasions; and

WHEREAS, Lee's desire to serve his community manifested in his close association with numerous other important groups and foundations across the state, including the Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center, St. James Place (founding chairman), Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center, Pennington Biomedical Research Foundation, The FISH, American Red Cross, Family Counseling Service Center, Baton Rouge Speech & Hearing Foundation, Louisiana Arts & Science Center, Rotary Club of Baton Rouge, Capital Area United Way, Baton Rouge Symphony, Boy Scouts of America, Friends of the Rural Life Museum, Baton Rouge Area Foundation, Louisiana Art & Science Museum, Public Affairs Research Council, Boys Club of America, Greater Baton Rouge Chamber of Commerce, Baton Rouge Area Foundation, Council for a Better Louisiana, Louisiana Association of Business and Industry, The Young Leaders Academy of Baton Rouge, Inc., Association for Retarded Citizens, Community Fund for the Arts, LSU Business Partnership Board for Excellence, LSU Manship School of Mass Communication, University Laboratory School Foundation, Baton Rouge Youth, Inc., and National Conference of Christians & Jews; and

WHEREAS, Lee's contributions to his community have been recognized through many awards during his lifetime, highlights of which included his induction into the LSU Hall of Distinction and the E.J. Ourso College of Business Hall Distinction, his selection as a 1984 Volunteer Activist, the National Conference of Christians and Jews Brotherhood Award, Greater Baton Rouge Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals 2008 Outstanding Volunteer Fundraiser of the Year, Greater Baton Rouge Business Report and Junior Achievement Hall of Fame's 1996 Businessperson of the Year, Istrouma Area Council Boy Scouts of America Distinguished Citizen Award, the Baton Rouge Speech & Hearing Foundation's Volunteer Activist of the Year Award, and the Highland Park High School Distinguished Alumni Award; and

WHEREAS, Lee also had the honor of carrying the 1996 Olympic torch through Baton Rouge as a member of the U.S. Olympic Committee; and

WHEREAS, while Lee was always busy with his business and civic activities, his passion and priority was always with his lovely wife, Barrie, and his three children, Lee Jr., Bill, and Beth; and

WHEREAS, his family brought him great joy, and he was loved, adored, and revered by his wife, children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, Lee is survived by his wife, Barrie, his children Lee (Leigh Ann) Griffin, Bill (Lisa) Griffin, Beth Griffin (Alan Miller); his grandchildren, Madeline and Jack Griffin, Lauren (Matthew) Morehead, Michael and Andrew Griffin, Alli (Collin) Yeargin, Anna Katherine (Austin) Jackson, Griffin Miller; and great-grandchildren Aubrey Kate and Lydia Yeargin.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby offer its sincere condolences on behalf of its members, past and present, and on behalf of the citizens of the state of Louisiana to the family of George Lee Griffin Sr., a pioneer of the banking industry, public servant, philanthropist, and dedicated family man.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be transmitted to Barrie Griffin, Lee Griffin Jr., Bill Griffin, and Beth Griffin.

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PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE