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## SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 330

Offered January 10, 2007

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*Celebrating the life of Victoria Jackson Gray Adams.*

Patron—Marsh

WHEREAS, Victoria Jackson Gray Adams, a native of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and adopted daughter of the Commonwealth, was born on November 5, 1926, and departed this life on August 12, 2006; and

WHEREAS, Victoria Jackson Gray Adams graduated from Depriest Consolidated School in Palmers Crossing, in Hattiesburg, Mississippi; attended Wilberforce University, Tuskegee Institute (now University), and Jackson State College (now University); and, after leaving college because of financial difficulties, married and began a career selling cosmetics; and

WHEREAS, in 1962, Victoria Jackson Gray Adams became a field organizer for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and taught literacy and voter education to sharecroppers; in 1964, she ran in Mississippi's Democratic primary, challenging Mississippi's rigid and hostile system of racial segregation and demanding voting rights for African Americans, and later that year, she helped to form the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, which unsuccessfully challenged the credentials of the all-white Mississippi delegation to the 1964 Democratic National Convention; and

WHEREAS, Victoria Jackson Gray Adams was elected to the national board of directors of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an organization created by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; and

WHEREAS, Victoria Jackson Gray Adams became the first woman to run for the United States Senate from Mississippi, and was one of the first three African American women in United States history to be seated as guests on the floor of the United States Senate; and

WHEREAS, Victoria Jackson Gray Adams, one of the earliest and most vigorous supporters of civil and human rights in Mississippi, continued her work in spite of repeated threats upon her life and the lives of her family, assisted in opening Freedom Schools that advocated for civil rights, and, in 1964, was a founding member of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and Director of its national office in Washington, D.C.; and

WHEREAS, her valiant efforts helped to win the right to vote for persons of African descent across the South, and gave many more marginalized persons an opportunity to experience human dignity, wholeness, and sanity by removing the oppressive system of racial segregation; and

WHEREAS, after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Victoria Jackson Gray Adams moved to Virginia where she served as a lay leader of the Methodist Church and as campus minister for 30 years at Virginia State University; and

WHEREAS, during her eventful and history-making lifetime, Victoria Jackson Gray Adams was a wife, mother, grandmother, public school teacher in rural Mississippi, businesswoman, realtor, campus minister at Virginia State University, Methodist Church lay leader, and community activist; while living in Bangkok, Thailand, she participated in the Thai and American Women's Club, taught in the Royal Thai Army Languages Academy, and founded and served as the first president of the Afro American Women's Club (AAWC); and

WHEREAS, her considerable abilities and personal interests in the welfare of others resulted in her service as a teacher and lecturer at local, state, national, and international institutions of higher education and organizations, among them Harvard University, Jackson State University, Stanford University, Tougaloo College, University of Virginia, Iliff School of Theology, Gettysburg College, University of Southern Mississippi, Northwood Appold Community Academy Public Charter School, Earlham College, SpiritHouse, Phillips Exeter Academy, University of Michigan, United Nations Development Fund for Women, and Alex Haley's Farm at the Children's Defense Fund; and

WHEREAS, Victoria Jackson Gray Adams served as a dedicated and creative member of the Virginia Fire Services Board for 11 years, as Vice President of the National Board of the Institute for Cultural Affairs of the Ecumenical Institute of North America, and as a member of numerous organizations, among them local and conference level boards and commissions of the United Methodist Church; and

WHEREAS, as a committed, diligent, and effective member of the Virginia General Assembly's Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission, she worked tirelessly to ensure the continuation of Dr. King's work and the perpetuation of his legacy, and with her vast knowledge of history and extensive personal experience in the Civil Rights Movement, she provided little known information about facts and people to illuminate the historical and social context of events during the civil rights era, and aided

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59 the Commission in defining and focusing the context of historical events, developing a framework for its  
60 legislative responsibilities, and establishing the Martin Luther King, Jr. Living History Museum and  
61 Public Policy Center; and

62 WHEREAS, her contributions to society and the world span more than seven decades, and Victoria  
63 Jackson Gray Adams has received numerous awards, citations, and commendations, among them the  
64 Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Service Award; Wilberforce University's Distinguished Alumni  
65 Award; the John Wesley Award for Education, the United Methodist Church's highest education award;  
66 the Methodist Federation for Social Action's Bishop Leontine Kelly Peace and Justice Award; the Fannie  
67 Lou Hamer Humanitarian Award; and recognition at the 2004 Democratic Convention for her  
68 trailblazing role in 1964 in challenging the credentials of the all-white Mississippi delegation to the  
69 Democratic National Convention; and

70 WHEREAS, at the age 37, her photograph was featured on the poster for the Academy Award  
71 nominated film, *Freedom On My Mind*, and on the book jackets of *Freedom is a Constant Struggle* and  
72 *Freedom's Daughters*, and she was also featured in numerous civil rights films, documentaries, and  
73 books, including the Pulitzer Prize winning book, *Parting the Waters*, *This Little Light of Mine: The Life*  
74 *of Fannie Lou Hamer*, the documentary film, *Eyes on the Prize*, and the recent film, *Standing On My*  
75 *Sisters' Shoulders*; and

76 WHEREAS, a woman of great vision who was profoundly committed to empowering and elevating  
77 average people in order that they may access opportunities that would provide greater life choices,  
78 Victoria Jackson Gray Adams, with clarity and purpose, devoted her life to family and mankind; and

79 WHEREAS, Victoria Jackson Gray Adams persevered and prayed through real threats and great fear,  
80 and lived according to her own adage: "Life shrinks or expands in direct proportion to the courage with  
81 which we live it," and her family, friends, and colleagues lament the loss of her vision, wisdom,  
82 fortitude, charity, tutelage, "signature hats," and her remarkable courage that sparked the change in civil  
83 and human rights in our country; and

84 WHEREAS, although Victoria Jackson Gray Adams, full of years, has passed peacefully and  
85 victoriously from this life to the next into the arms of the Almighty, she leaves a rich legacy of  
86 immense bravery, immeasurable courage, and unselfish contributions to her loved ones, friends,  
87 colleagues, the nation, and this Commonwealth; now; therefore, be it

88 RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby  
89 note with great sadness the loss of Victoria Jackson Gray Adams, civil rights leader and pioneer,  
90 educator, community activist, entrepreneur, and longtime campus minister; and, be it

91 RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for  
92 presentation to the family of Victoria Jackson Gray Adams as an expression of the veneration and  
93 respect in which her life, contributions, and memory are held by the members of the General Assembly.