ENROLLED

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 167

Commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Thalhimers Department Store Lunch Counter Sit-In.

Agreed to by the Senate, February 15, 2010
Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 18, 2010

WHEREAS, after Reconstruction, a time of national restoration and healing of deep wounds, in an effort to deny and abolish the civil rights and freedom gained at the close of the American Civil War, formerly enslaved African Americans were subjugated by a system of laws, known as Jim Crow laws, enacted to continue the system of de jure segregation in all areas of society, including public accommodations, schools, housing, employment, restaurants, religious affiliations, health care services, the criminal justice system, and transportation; and

WHEREAS, the Jim Crow era also imposed a set of unwritten social rules and customs that required African Americans to be deferential to whites at all times; the rigid separation of the races was upheld under the doctrine of "separate but equal" by the United States Supreme Court in 1896 in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (163 U.S. 537); and *Plessy* resulted in increased discrimination toward African Americans, providing justification for segregation in public facilities and accommodations throughout the nation; and

WHEREAS, after 50 years, the constitutionality of *Plessy* was challenged and reversed by the Supreme Court, ushering in the Civil Rights Movement in which African Americans boldly and courageously protested racial inequality, injustice, and the indignity of second-class citizenship and demanded the rights afforded them by the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution: full citizenship and "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"; and

WHEREAS, with the advent of the modern Civil Rights Movement, African Americans struggled relentlessly for the right to vote and participate in the political process, for equal educational opportunities, access to public accommodations, and racial equality and justice in all areas of life; and

WHEREAS, on February 22, 1960, determined, emboldened, encouraged, and inspired by the first student sit-in in Greensboro, North Carolina, by students from North Carolina A & T College to desegregate the Woolworth's Department Store lunch counter, the equivalent of fast-food restaurants today, more than 200 Virginia Union University students, led by Frank George Pinkston and Charles Melvin Sherrod, assembled on campus and marched in protest to the shopping district along Broad and Grace Streets in downtown Richmond, where they entered the "Whites Only" lunch counter at Thalhimers Department Store and were refused service, though they remained in their seats until the store closed; and

WHEREAS, undaunted by seemingly insurmountable obstacles and inequities and unspeakable indignities imposed by Jim Crow laws, 34 Virginia Union University students returned to Thalhimers Department Store two days later and were again refused service; and

WHEREAS, these students, known as the "Richmond 34," were subjected to insult, abuse, and intimidation and were arrested and imprisoned for trespassing because they picketed the luxurious Richmond Room restaurant at the store; and

WHEREAS, the members of the "Richmond 34" were Leroy M. Bray, Jr., Gordon Coleman, Jr., Gloria C. Collins, Robert B. Dalton, Marise L. Ellison, Joseph E. Ellison, Wendell T. Foster, Jr., Anderson J. Franklin, Donald Vincent Goode, Woodrow B. Grant, Albert Van Graves, Jr., George Wendall Harris, Thalma Y. Hickman, Joanna Hinton, Carolyn Ann Horne, Richard C. Jackson, Elizabeth Patricia Johnson, Ford Tucker Johnson, Jr., Milton Johnson, Celia E. Jones, Clarence A. Jones, John J. McCall, Frank George Pinkston, Larry Pridgen, Ceotis L. Pryor, Raymond B. Randolph, Jr., Samuel F. Shaw, Charles Melvin Sherrod, Virginia G. Simms, Ronald B. Smith, Barbara A. Thornton, Randolf A. Tobias, Patricia A. Washington, and Lois B. White; and

WHEREAS, Frank George Pinkston, student leader, challenged the African American community as he was being arrested, "set the flame and put some oil on it and keep a blaze going," and the "Richmond 34" sealed their place in the Civil Rights Movement as sit-ins became a form of peaceful protest against segregationist policies; and

WHEREAS, the student protest galvanized the Richmond community; the students' arrest and great personal sacrifice launched shopping boycotts by the African American community, further pickets of business establishments by Virginia Union University and high school students, and a campaign to destroy Jim Crow laws in Richmond, which were essentially dismantled by 1969; and

WHEREAS, members of the "Richmond 34" later became accomplished professionals in many fields, including law, education, medicine, jurisprudence, the ministry, business and industry, pharmacy, politics, the criminal justice system, and social sciences; and

WHEREAS, the arrest of the "Richmond 34," a historic event in the struggle for civil rights, will be

commemorated on February 22, 2010, with signature events and programs, including Sit-In/Stand Out, a program honoring the fiftieth anniversary of the student sit-in at the Thalhimers Department Store; a community luncheon; paintings and exhibits inspired by the event by area school children; a series of lectures, performances, and commemorative events at Virginia Union University; and the laying and dedication of a historic marker at Sixth and Broad Streets at Richmond CenterStage, the former site of the Thalhimers Department Store; and

WHEREAS, the "Richmond 34," like thousands of college students across the South, without reservation or trepidation, valiantly confronted the rabid racial animus, discrimination, and injustice that had deeply scarred their parents and generations before them, and risked their lives, reputations, and futures to dismantle Jim Crow so that their progeny and all persons may enjoy the promises of full citizenship and the certain unalienable rights to which they have been endowed by their Creator; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the fiftieth anniversary of the Thalhimers Department Store Lunch Counter Sit-In be commemorated; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate transmit a copy of this resolution to Dr. Claude G. Perkins, President of Virginia Union University, requesting that he further disseminate copies of this resolution to the members of the "Richmond 34" and the university's constituents so that they may be apprised of the sense of the General Assembly of Virginia in this matter.