

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 104

Celebrating the life of the Reverend Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker.

Agreed to by the Senate, February 8, 2018
Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 14, 2018

WHEREAS, the Reverend Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker, pastor, scholar, lifelong advocate for justice, and national leader in the Civil Rights Movement, died on January 23, 2018; and

WHEREAS, Wyatt Tee Walker, a graduate of Virginia Union University, served as pastor of Gillfield Baptist Church in Petersburg in the early years of the Civil Rights Movement, during which time he served concurrently as pastor of Mount Level Baptist Church in Dinwiddie, was president of the Petersburg branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), was state director of the Congress of Racial Equality, founded and led the Petersburg Improvement Association, and served as director of the board of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; and

WHEREAS, in resistance to the social injustices that he encountered throughout his life, Wyatt Tee Walker endured 17 arrests, the first of which occurred when he tried to borrow a book during a demonstration at the segregated Petersburg Public Library; and

WHEREAS, in his efforts to peacefully attain civil rights for African Americans in the South, Wyatt Tee Walker formed a friendship and partnership with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and served as his chief of staff; and

WHEREAS, at the invitation of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Wyatt Tee Walker moved to Atlanta with his wife, Theresa, and children to become the first full-time executive director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which, under his leadership, grew into an organization of national prominence, with the power to effect widespread and lasting change in the struggle for civil rights in the United States; and

WHEREAS, historic campaigns that won support for the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and brought national recognition to the efforts of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., were organized and supported by Wyatt Tee Walker, including the first phase of the Birmingham campaign, on which subsequent nonviolent demonstrations were modeled, and the March on Washington in 1963; and

WHEREAS, Wyatt Tee Walker's efforts contributed to the desegregation of the South and to the major victories for civil rights encoded in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965; and

WHEREAS, having made great progress in gaining civil rights, Wyatt Tee Walker did not lessen his efforts, but took on a new role as pastor at Canaan Baptist Church of Christ in Harlem where he served for 37 years, during which time he advocated for affordable housing and equality in education and continued to fight for civil rights not only in the United States, but worldwide; and

WHEREAS, Wyatt Tee Walker will be memorialized on the Virginia Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission's Emancipation Proclamation and Freedom Monument in Richmond, dedicated to the contributions of African American Virginians in the centuries-long fight for freedom in the United States; and

WHEREAS, the life and work of Wyatt Tee Walker have brought Virginia and the nation closer to the dream of peace and justice embodied in the Civil Rights Movement; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby note with great sadness the loss of the Reverend Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the family of the Reverend Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker, the Director of the Virginia State Conference NAACP, and the President of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference Virginia State Unit as an expression of the Senate's respect for Dr. Walker's memory and gratefulness for the progress that he brought about through his life's work.

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