

By: Senator(s) Fillingane, Barnett, Caughman, Clarke, Dawkins, Dearing, Frazier, Horhn, Jackson (32nd), Jordan, Norwood, Parker, Simmons (12th), Simmons (13th), Watson, Witherspoon

To: Rules

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 534

1 A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION MOURNING THE PASSING OF DECORATED
2 WORLD WAR II VETERAN, RESPECTED CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVIST AND
3 PRENTISS, MISSISSIPPI, CIVIC LEADER AND BUSINESSMAN WARDELL GRAY,
4 AND EXTENDING THE CONDOLENCES OF THE LEGISLATURE TO HIS SURVIVING
5 FAMILY.

6 WHEREAS, it is with profound sorrow that we note the passing
7 of decorated World War II Veteran, respected Civil Rights Activist
8 and Prentiss, Mississippi, Civic Leader and Businessman Wardell
9 Gray on January 13, 2018. He was the first African-American man
10 to run for office in Jefferson Davis County in 1959 and was one of
11 the largest landowners in the South; and

12 WHEREAS, Wardell Gray was born June 30, 1917, as the eldest
13 son and first of two sons of Mr. Will Gray and Mrs. Mary Elizabeth
14 Otis Gray in Carson, Mississippi. The year he was born, his
15 father was a Foreman with the Illinois Central Railroad, and they
16 lived for a number of years in Sumrall, Mississippi, where his
17 parents operated a boarding house for the other men who worked
18 under his father. Gray was exposed to hard work in the area of
19 farming and business at an early age. Upon their return to



20 Jefferson Davis County, his mother was the Teacher in a one-room
21 schoolhouse on the grounds of the Holisday Creek Missionary
22 Baptist Church. Due to the fact that there was no school for
23 blacks, he completed his eighth-grade education there and
24 continued his high school education at Prentiss Institute Junior
25 College. He was a good student and an awesome athlete as a
26 Baseball Pitcher with one of the Old Negro Leagues. His father,
27 Will Gray, passed away at the age of 110 years of age and his
28 mother, Mary, at age 97; and

29 WHEREAS, Wardell was drafted into the United States Army on
30 November 19, 1941, and fought in World War II in the following
31 battles and campaigns: Naples-Foggia, Rome-Arno, Rhineland, and
32 Central Europe. He received the American Defense Service Medal,
33 ATO Medal, Good Condition Medal, Meritorious Unit Award
34 and the World War II Victory Medal. He returned back to his home
35 from the Army on October 31, 1945; and

36 WHEREAS, while away at war, his parents were acquiring land.
37 Upon his return, his dream was to do the same and continue his
38 love for farming. In completing this vision, he met and married
39 the love of his life, Quillie Ross Gray. She was a graduate of
40 Jackson State University and continued out of state at Indiana
41 University to obtain a Master's degree. He was one of the few
42 African-Americans to open a dairy during the late 1940s. His
43 uncle, Dr. J.R. Otis, was President of Alcorn College. With this



44 relationship to the college, students who were agriculture majors
45 would travel to Gray Farms to intern; and

46 WHEREAS, as a Civil Rights Activist, Wardell Gray was
47 involved in fighting for voter registration, and an avid and
48 ardent supporter of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. In 1959, he was
49 the only African-American candidate to run for any type of public
50 office, Constable for his district, Beat 2. He later ran for
51 Election Commissioner. He became President of the Jefferson Davis
52 County Chapter of NAACP in 1959 and remained through 1974. He
53 picketed local stores and other national franchises regarding
54 employment discrimination practices. Gray worked tirelessly with
55 other Civil Rights giants such as Medgar and Charles Evers; Fannie
56 Lou Hamer; Reverend Darby; Dr. Aaron Henry, his cousin; Charles
57 Young; and many others known and unknown; and

58 WHEREAS, as a member of Blackmon Temple CME Church, Mr. Gray
59 brought his love of God, education, and children together, for it
60 was during the Civil Rights Movement that meetings of the NAACP,
61 Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, and Mississippi Action for
62 Progress (MAP) were held at churches throughout the state. He,
63 along with Mr. N.J. Booth, was instrumental in acquiring the land
64 for the first African-American school in Jefferson Davis County,
65 Carver High. Wardell Gray and his family suffered many attacks in
66 his life, but it did not stop him from fighting for Civil Rights.
67 He partnered with the Lawrence County Branch of the NAACP to



68 ensure the hiring of African-Americans at St. Regis Paper Company
69 (now Georgia Pacific); and

70 WHEREAS, his wife was fired from the school system briefly
71 due to Reverend Darby and Gray filing the lawsuit against poll tax
72 for the right to vote. Gray formed biracial committees to tackle
73 the troubles in the county such as separate colored and white
74 waiting rooms at medical clinics. When the NAACP was sued for
75 millions of dollars, he was in the forefront of fundraising to
76 assist the National Branch in meeting their need. He was the
77 first African-American to be appointed under President Jimmy
78 Carter to serve on the ASC Committee; and

79 WHEREAS, the loves of his life were his two children, his
80 grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He was a mentor to many
81 children in the community and beyond. Gray leaves to cherish his
82 memory his children: Dr. Pene' Gray Woods (Curtis) of Cordova,
83 Tennessee, and Joseph Willie (Sheryl) Gray of Hattiesburg,
84 Mississippi; grandchildren: Christopher (Lynsi), Dominic, Joseph,
85 Jr., Jayla, Kyle Meyers, Joseph and Ashley Smith; and
86 great-grandchildren: Caitlyn, Chris II, Dominic II. Volumes
87 could be written about the number of people Gray counseled,
88 inspired, encouraged and helped along in their lives. Gray will
89 be remembered as a gentleman, friend, and servant; lover of his
90 family, community and his God; and we pay tribute and cherish
91 fondly his memory:



92 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF
93 MISSISSIPPI, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING THEREIN, That
94 we do hereby mourn the passing of decorated World War II Veteran,
95 Respected Activist and Prentiss, Mississippi, Civic Leader and
96 Businessman Mr. Wardell Gray, and extend the condolences of the
97 Legislature to his surviving family.

98 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That this resolution be presented to
99 the surviving family of Ward Gray and made available to the
100 Capitol Press Corps.

