

By: Senator(s) Clarke, McMahan, Wilemon,
Dearing, Jackson (11th), Jackson (32nd),
Jordan

To: Rules

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 599

1 A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION COMMENDING AND CONGRATULATING THE
2 2019 MISSISSIPPI PRUDENTIAL SPIRIT OF COMMUNITY AWARD WINNERS:
3 JOSEPH VOYNIK (STATE HONOREE), KEEGAN FIGUEROA (STATE HONOREE),
4 ANNABELLE BUNCH (DISTINGUISHED FINALIST), SHELBY COOPER
5 (DISTINGUISHED FINALIST), HAYES LESYER (DISTINGUISHED FINALIST),
6 AND MARLIE MCCLUNG (DISTINGUISHED FINALIST).

7 WHEREAS, the prestigious 2019 Prudential Spirit of Community
8 Award, now in its 24th year, presented by Prudential Financial in
9 partnership with the National Association of Secondary School
10 Principals, honors young volunteers across America who have
11 demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to serving their
12 communities; and

13 WHEREAS, these are Mississippi's Top Youth Volunteers of
14 2019:

- 15 • High School State Honoree: Joseph Voynik, nominated by
16 Jackson Preparatory School.

17 Joseph, a senior at Jackson Preparatory School, worked for
18 four years and raised more than \$600,000.00 to construct a fully
19 accessible baseball field so that children with disabilities could
20 experience the joy of playing America's national pastime. Joseph



21 has always been aware of the obstacles faced by people with
22 disabilities; when his mother was in high school, a car accident
23 paralyzed her from the waist down. "I noticed that people with
24 disabilities often do not have the same opportunities as the
25 able-bodied," Joseph said. While watching a major league baseball
26 game on TV in 2014, he saw a commercial about the Miracle League.
27 "It was the first time I had ever seen children with disabilities
28 experience the joy and excitement of playing baseball on an
29 accessible field," he said. Joseph immediately wanted to get
30 involved, but soon discovered that there was not a single fully
31 accessible field in Mississippi for players with disabilities. So
32 he decided he would build one. Joseph first shared his idea with
33 classmates at school, who helped organize a one-mile run that
34 raised \$10,000.00 for his cause. With his parents' help, he
35 established the Miracle League of Central Mississippi, a 501(c)(3)
36 nonprofit, and then persuaded a neighboring town to provide a
37 site. Over the next few years, Joseph solicited donations from
38 businesses and foundations and promoted his project via a website
39 and social media. After raising hundreds of thousands of dollars,
40 he helped plan and oversee the construction of the field itself,
41 with a rubberized surface and wheelchair-accessible dugouts.
42 Mississippi's first Miracle League baseball field opened on April
43 20, 2018, and hosted six teams in its first season. "I believe
44 this field and league of players has opened the hearts and eyes of



45 many in the community to see all that these disabled players can
46 accomplish when given the opportunity," said Joseph.

47 • Middle Level State Honoree: Keegan Figueroa, nominated by
48 Williams-Sullivan Elementary School in Durant.

49 Keegan, an eighth-grader at Mooreville Middle School, helped
50 collect almost 30,000 pounds of basic necessities and deliver them
51 to Puerto Rico a month after Hurricane Maria devastated the
52 island. Keegan's father was born in Puerto Rico and lived there
53 until he was 16. "Most of his family still lives there," said
54 Keegan, who has visited the island several times. "When the
55 hurricane hit, I was terrified," he said. "I instantly knew that
56 I wanted to help." As in many disaster situations, it took
57 several days for Keegan's family to make contact with relatives
58 there. Thankfully, they were all safe, he said, but many had lost
59 almost everything, and they had no access to water or electricity.
60 To help the family's efforts in delivering supplies to Puerto
61 Rico, Keegan decided to get students at his school involved in the
62 cause. He posted flyers and posters that explained what items
63 were needed and placed donation boxes at every entrance to the
64 school. Keegan and his family also solicited help from churches,
65 clubs and organizations, as well as local businesses. After
66 donations such as medicine, hygiene products, diapers, baby
67 formula, batteries and generators were stored in the Figueroa
68 garage, Keegan organized a group of 20 friends to come and pack
69 the items into boxes. Once Keegan and his father arrived in



70 Puerto Rico, they began distributing the donations to people in
71 need. While on the island, Keegan also worked with the National
72 Guard to deliver care packages, purified water and start
73 rebuilding houses. "The smiles and gratitude on the people's
74 faces were worth all the trouble and hardship it took," said
75 Keegan.

76 As State Honorees, Joseph and Keegan each will receive
77 \$1,000.00, an engraved Silver Medallion and an all-expense-paid
78 trip in early May to Washington, D.C., where they will join the
79 Top Two Honorees from each of the other states and the District of
80 Columbia for four days of national recognition events. During the
81 trip, ten students will be named America's Top Youth Volunteers of
82 2019; and

83 WHEREAS, the program judges also recognized four other
84 Mississippi students as Distinguished Finalists for their
85 impressive community service activities. Each will receive an
86 engraved Bronze Medallion. These are Mississippi's Distinguished
87 Finalists for 2019:

88 • Annabelle Bunch, 17, of Saltillo, Mississippi, a member of
89 the Northern Mississippi American Red Cross and a Senior at
90 Itawamba Agricultural High School, launched "Just Too Sweet" as an
91 initiative to promote awareness, advocacy and action to find a
92 cure for Type 1 Diabetes. As a teenager living with the
93 condition, the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation Youth



94 Advocacy Leader has raised more than \$14,000.00 and bolstered
95 awareness via social media and speaking engagements.

96 • Shelby Cooper, 17, of Canton, Mississippi, a Senior at
97 Germantown High School, serves as Volunteer Coordinator of the
98 Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services' Backpack
99 Program, a role she took after discovering that many foster
100 children must carry their belongings in trash bags when they move
101 between residences. She organized a community effort that
102 involved product donations so foster kids can receive a backpack
103 containing items such as shampoo, stuffed animals, toothbrushes
104 and fun activities.

105 • Hayes Lesyer, 17, of Pass Christian, Mississippi, a Senior
106 at Pass Christian High School, launched an initiative called "Pass
107 Packs" after learning that many of his classmates received free
108 and discounted lunches during school, but still experienced hunger
109 on weekends. Pass Packs requires ongoing fundraising to fill and
110 distribute bags of food that his peers take home each Friday; he
111 is securing leadership to ensure the program is able to continue
112 after he graduates.

113 • Marlie McClung, 16, of Tishomingo, Mississippi, a Junior
114 at Belmont High School, serves as a Youth Leader in working to
115 prevent students from using tobacco and encourage existing users
116 to kick the habit. As a member of the Youth Advocacy Team of
117 Tishomingo County, she serves as an Ambassador sharing information
118 with students in her hometown schools. Marlie also helped inspire



119 200 students to commit to staying away from tobacco and related
120 products as part of "Kick Butts Day"; and

121 WHEREAS, "These young volunteers learned and demonstrated
122 that they can make meaningful contributions to individuals and
123 communities through their service," said Prudential CEO Charles
124 Lowrey. "It is an honor to recognize their great work, and we
125 hope that shining a spotlight on their service inspires others to
126 consider how they might make a difference." "Each of these
127 honorees is proof that students have the energy, creativity and
128 unique perspectives to create positive change," said JoAnn
129 Bartoletti, Executive Director of the National Association of
130 Secondary School Principals. "We commend each of the 2019
131 Honorees for their outstanding volunteer service, and for the
132 invaluable example they have set for their peers"; and

133 WHEREAS, all public and private middle-level and high schools
134 in the country, as well as all Girl Scout Councils, county 4-H
135 organizations, American Red Cross Chapters, YMCAs, Camp Fire USA
136 Councils and volunteer centers are eligible to select a student or
137 member for a local Prudential Spirit of Community Award. Local
138 honorees were then reviewed by state-level judges, who selected
139 State Honorees and Distinguished Finalists based on criteria such
140 as personal initiative, creativity, effort, impact and personal
141 growth; and

142 WHEREAS, the success of the State of Mississippi, the
143 strength of our communities and the overall vitality of American



144 society depend, in great measure, upon the dedication of these
145 young Mississippi citizens, who use their considerable talents and
146 resources to serve others:

147 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF
148 MISSISSIPPI, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING THEREIN, That
149 we do hereby commend and congratulate the 2019 Mississippi
150 Prudential Spirit of Community Award Winners: Joseph Voynik
151 (State Honoree), Keegan Figueroa (State Honoree), Annabelle Bunch
152 (Distinguished Finalist), Shelby Cooper (Distinguished Finalist),
153 Hayes Lesyer (Distinguished Finalist), and Marlie McClung
154 (Distinguished Finalist), and extend to these honorees and their
155 families the best wishes for success in their future endeavors.

156 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That this resolution be presented to
157 Mississippi's Top Youth Volunteers and made available to the
158 Capitol Press Corps.

