

By: Senator(s) Kirby, Norwood, Simmons  
(12th), Barnett, Barrett, Blackwell, Blount,  
Boyd, Butler, Caughman, Chism, Frazier,  
Hopson, Horhn, McLendon, Michel, Seymour,  
Suber, Thomas, Turner-Ford, Williams,  
Witherspoon, Simmons (13th), Jackson (32nd)

To: Rules

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 502

1 A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION REMEMBERING THE LEGACY OF FORMER  
2 GOVERNOR WILLIAM F. WINTER AND EXTENDING THE DEEPEST SYMPATHY OF  
3 THE LEGISLATURE TO HIS SURVIVING FAMILY AND FRIENDS ON HIS  
4 PASSING.

5 WHEREAS, it is with sadness and great respect that we join  
6 the family, friends and citizens of Mississippi in mourning the  
7 passing of former Governor William Forrest Winter on December 18,  
8 2021, at age 97. Governor Winter's legacy in Mississippi will  
9 forever be tied to ushering sweeping reforms of the public school  
10 system and for his commitment to achieving racial reconciliation;  
11 and

12 WHEREAS, born in 1923 in Grenada, he grew up in a family that  
13 highly valued education. His mother, a teacher, taught him in a  
14 one-room school through the second grade. He then attended and  
15 graduated from Grenada High School. After his graduation from Ole  
16 Miss in 1943, he served in the U.S. Army Infantry in the  
17 Philippines during World War II emerging as a Captain and was  
18 recalled to service during the Korean War. He served as a Major  
19 in the Mississippi National Guard until 1957; and



20           WHEREAS, after his military service, he returned to  
21 Mississippi and graduated from law school at Ole Miss. While  
22 still in law school, he was elected to the Mississippi Legislature  
23 in 1947. He was subsequently re-elected twice to that seat; and

24           WHEREAS, in 1956, he became the Tax Collector for the State  
25 of Mississippi. He was subsequently elected to the offices of  
26 State Treasurer and Lieutenant Governor. He was elected Governor  
27 in 1979 and served from 1980-1984; and

28           WHEREAS, "The only road out of poverty runs past the  
29 schoolhouse door," Winter famously said as he championed the  
30 Education Reform Act of 1982, heralded at the time as the most  
31 significant state education legislation since Mississippi created  
32 its public education system in 1870. Winter barnstormed the state  
33 generating support for the act and in a Special Session of the  
34 Legislature ultimately secured its passage; and

35           WHEREAS, the Education Reform Act of 1982 brought increased  
36 school funding and a teacher pay raise, created a compulsory  
37 attendance law, a school accountability system, and publicly  
38 funded kindergarten, among other reforms. It was a notable break  
39 from the state leadership's racist apathy toward public education.  
40 The late nationally syndicated Columnist Carl Rowan wrote, "The  
41 greatest piece of Civil Rights, national security and economic  
42 recovery legislation enacted this year. It is the bill enacted by  
43 the Mississippi Legislature to spend \$106 Million to give children  
44 of Mississippi a more reasonable chance at a decent education and



45 lift Mississippi out of the ignominy of being the worst-educated  
46 state in the union"; and

47 WHEREAS, Winter, a Democrat, ran for the U.S. Senate against  
48 Thad Cochran after serving as Governor, losing that race and  
49 ending his elective political career. However, he remained a  
50 prominent figure in Mississippi politics throughout the remainder  
51 of his life; and

52 WHEREAS, after serving as Governor, he was a tireless  
53 advocate for racial reconciliation in Mississippi and is  
54 nationally recognized for that work. He received a number of  
55 awards recognizing those efforts, including the John F. Kennedy  
56 Profile in Courage Award, the Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial  
57 Award, the National Civil Rights Museum Freedom Award, and he has  
58 been honored by the naming of the William F. Winter Archives and  
59 History Building in Jackson. He was also the driving force and  
60 namesake of the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation  
61 at Ole Miss. He also received honorary degrees from Millsaps  
62 College, Tougaloo College, Mississippi University for Women,  
63 William Carey University, Mississippi College School of Law,  
64 Davidson College, Troy State University, the University of North  
65 Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Mississippi State University. He had  
66 most recently served as Special Counsel in the Jones Walker Law  
67 Firm in Jackson; and

68 WHEREAS, Governor Winter appointed Jack Reed, Sr., to a Blue  
69 Ribbon Education Panel in the 1980s and asked the panel to make



70 recommendations for improving the state's education system. The  
71 two worked together again in 2001 on the committee that  
72 recommended a statewide vote to change the flag. The vote  
73 ultimately left the 1894 flag bearing a Confederate battle emblem  
74 in place, but the two men were nonetheless vocal in their desire  
75 to see a new flag, despite strong opposition to the idea. The  
76 goal that Winter and Reed sought for two decades finally became  
77 reality in 2020, when the Legislature retired the 1894 flag and  
78 the state's voters strongly backed a new design. Reed passed away  
79 in 2016 and did not live to see the change, but Winter did. Even  
80 though the former Governor was elated that he lived to see the  
81 state do away with the flag, he still believed there was more  
82 progress to be made in the state. The last public statement  
83 Winter issued was praising state lawmakers in June for voting to  
84 change Mississippi's divisive flag, which he said was long  
85 overdue. But he made the point himself that there was much still  
86 left undone; and

87 WHEREAS, Republican former Governor Haley Barbour recalled  
88 Winter as a friend, "a gentleman, honorable and gracious." "While  
89 our politics didn't always coincide, I've always admired him,"  
90 Barbour said. "He made great changes in the structure of  
91 Mississippi's K-12 educational system ... He and Mrs. Winter, who is  
92 a delightful, gracious lady, represented our state very well, both  
93 while he was in elected office and afterwards"; and



94           WHEREAS, married to the former Elise Varner of Senatobia for  
95 70 years, the couple had three daughters, five grandchildren and  
96 four great-grandchildren; and

97           WHEREAS, Governor Winter was a treasure to the State of  
98 Mississippi and his legacy in public service and advocacy for  
99 racial reconciliation will continue to be felt for years to come;  
100 and

101           WHEREAS, we pay tribute and cherish fondly the memory of this  
102 most public-spirited citizen of Mississippi with enormous civic  
103 energy who will be missed by all who were fortunate enough to have  
104 experienced his leadership and friendship:

105           NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF  
106 MISSISSIPPI, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING THEREIN, That  
107 we do hereby remember the legacy of former Governor William F.  
108 Winter and extend the deepest sympathy of the Legislature to his  
109 surviving family and friends on his passing.

110           BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That this resolution be presented to  
111 the surviving family of Governor William Winter, forwarded to the  
112 State Board of Education and the Mississippi Institute for Racial  
113 Reconciliation, and made available to the Capitol Press Corps.

