

By: Senator(s) Blount, Kirby, Bryan,
Branning, Frazier, Hopson, Horhn, Michel,
Norwood, Simmons (13th), Sparks, Thomas

To: Rules

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 508

1 A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION PAYING TRIBUTE TO THE MISSISSIPPI
2 PUBLIC HEALTH CAREER OF DR. ALTON COBB, RESPECTED VETERAN STATE
3 HEALTH OFFICER AND FIRST EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE MISSISSIPPI
4 MEDICAID COMMISSION AND AWARD WINNING ADVOCATE FOR MISSISSIPPI'S
5 PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM, AND EXPRESSING THE CONDOLENCES OF THE
6 LEGISLATURE TO HIS SURVIVING FAMILY.

7 WHEREAS, we join the public health community of the State of
8 Mississippi in mourning the passing of Dr. Alton Cobb. He passed
9 away on October 14, 2021. From his humble beginnings consisting
10 of a dogtrot log cabin and one room schoolhouse to his rise in
11 leading Mississippi's public health system and advocating for more
12 affordable and accessible health care for all citizens of
13 Mississippi; and

14 WHEREAS, Dr. Cobb - known to his family as Al - was born to
15 Joseph Harrison and Winnie Ora Cobb in the Cameron community near
16 Camden, Mississippi, on October 19, 1928. From that dirt road in
17 Madison County, he went on to a career that filled his life with
18 purpose and public service; and

19 WHEREAS, as a child, Dr. Cobb attended public schools and
20 remained a strong proponent of public education his entire life.



21 He started in a one-room schoolhouse in Camden and graduated from
22 Camden High School in 1946. He attended Holmes Junior (Community)
23 College, graduated from the University of Mississippi and then
24 attended the Medical School Program at the University of
25 Mississippi. He loved Ole Miss for the rest of his life and made
26 it plain to his nine grandchildren that he would help with the
27 cost of their tuition if, and only if, they went to the University
28 of Mississippi; and

29 WHEREAS, Dr. Cobb attended Johns Hopkins Medical School in
30 Baltimore, Maryland. Impressively, he entered the top medical
31 school backed by a recommendation written by Dr. Arthur Guyton,
32 the author of what is perhaps the most widely read medical
33 textbook in the world. At Hopkins, Dr. Cobb met a young Waterloo,
34 Iowa, nursing student named Mary O'Connor. He earned his degree
35 from Hopkins in 1954, and convinced Mary to marry him and move
36 south. Dr. Cobb's internship at Charity Hospital in New Orleans
37 was followed by two years of active service in the U.S. Army
38 Medical Corps during the Korean War. Shortly thereafter, he
39 received a Master of Public Health Degree from Tulane University
40 in 1960. He retired as a full Colonel from the Mississippi
41 National Guard following many years of service; and

42 WHEREAS, after a brief solo medical practice in the small
43 town of Pickens, Mississippi, Dr. Cobb began a 35 year career in
44 public health. He first served as a county health director for
45 Sunflower County, and he soon became the director of Chronic



46 Disease Services for the State Department of Health. Dr. Cobb was
47 an active voice in conversations with Governor John Bell Williams
48 about the necessity of bringing Medicaid to Mississippi. When
49 that came to pass, Dr. Cobb became the first Executive Director of
50 the Mississippi Medicaid Commission; and

51 WHEREAS, in 1973, he was appointed State Health Officer for
52 the Mississippi Department of Health, a position he held until
53 1992. Assisted by dedicated public servants, Dr. Cobb led the
54 reorganization of the agency and several major initiatives,
55 including: implementing the nationally recognized Mississippi
56 Women's, Infants' and Children's Program; a reduction in infant
57 mortality and tuberculosis rates; compulsory school vaccinations;
58 modernized public health statutes; stronger patient protection in
59 nursing homes and licensure regulations for home health care; and
60 a statewide emergency medical services system. After retiring
61 from the Mississippi State Department of Health, he served almost
62 a decade as clinical consultant for Information and Quality
63 Healthcare; and

64 WHEREAS, Dr. Cobb received multiple honors and awards during
65 his career, including Alumnus of the Year from Holmes Community
66 College and the Tulane School of Public Health. For several years
67 he served as an alternate delegate from Mississippi to the
68 American Medical Association. He was awarded the prestigious
69 Woodrow Wilson Award for Public Service by the Johns Hopkins
70 School of Medicine. He was recognized by the American Public



71 Health Association as a recipient of an award of Merit; Public
72 Administrator of the Year for Mississippi 1981; Blair Batson Award
73 of Merit from the Mississippi Academy of Pediatrics and most
74 recently the Humanitarian Award from the Mississippi Academy of
75 Family Physicians; and

76 WHEREAS, in retirement, Dr Cobb invested in charitable causes
77 and spent countless hours at the "old home place" near Camden,
78 where he inspected his pine trees and welcomed families and
79 friends for regular Sunday gatherings; and

80 WHEREAS, Dr. Cobb's parents Joe and Winnie Ora, and his older
81 brother John Herbert, preceded him in death; and

82 WHEREAS, he is survived by his wife of 67 years, Mary
83 O'Connor Cobb; children: Mary Alene Alford, Dr. Tommy Cobb and
84 Susan Cobb. Also surviving are grandchildren: Timothy Alford,
85 Leah Hendrix, John Paul Alford, Jenny Sneed, Lauren Steele,
86 Cameron Cobb, Scott Jimenez, Sara Burns and Mary Grace Suggs and
87 18 (soon to be 19) great-grandchildren; and

88 WHEREAS, Mississippi has lost many valued pioneers in the
89 healthcare field, and Dr. Alton Cobb is at the top of that list,
90 and we cherish fondly the memory of this most public-spirited
91 citizen of Mississippi whose enormous public health and civic
92 energy is a wonderful example for all Mississippians. He will be
93 sorely missed.

94 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF
95 MISSISSIPPI, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING THEREIN, That



96 we do hereby pay tribute to the Mississippi public health career
97 of Dr. Alton Cobb, respected veteran state health officer and
98 first Executive Director of the Mississippi Medicaid Commission
99 and award-winning advocate for Mississippi's public health system,
100 and expressing the condolences of the Legislature to his surviving
101 family.

102 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That this resolution be presented to
103 the surviving family of Dr. Alton Cobb and forwarded to the
104 Governor, the State Board of Health, the Executive Director of the
105 Division of Medicaid, the Mississippi Medical Association, and
106 made available to the Capitol Press Corps.

