

By: Senator(s) Williams, Hickman, Simmons  
(12th), Barnett, Butler (38th)

To: Rules

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 93

1 A RESOLUTION REMEMBERING THE LEGACY OF WILLIE JOHNSON AS THE  
2 FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN FIRE CHIEF OF STARKVILLE, MISSISSIPPI.

3 WHEREAS, as part of Mississippi's Black History Month  
4 Celebration, we remember the legacy of Chief Willie Johnson, who  
5 was appointed to the position of Starkville, Mississippi, Fire  
6 Chief by the Starkville Board of Aldermen on November 30, 1988;  
7 and

8 WHEREAS, Willie Johnson was the first African American to  
9 hold the position of Fire Chief in Starkville's history; and

10 WHEREAS, Johnson won the appointment on a 6-1 vote of  
11 Aldermen. He was selected from two internal applicants for the  
12 position. The dissenting vote was from a concern for Mr. Johnson  
13 over a decrease in salary he would take, as he had served with the  
14 rank of Assistant Fire Chief with the department and held a second  
15 position as Director of Emergency Medical Services at Oktibbeha  
16 County Hospital from which he had to leave in order to assume the  
17 full-time position; and



18           WHEREAS, Mr. Johnson was proud to accept the first-time  
19 position, stating that his personal finances were of no concern.  
20 He was very happy upon learning of the appointment as he accepted  
21 congratulations from supporters. "It's going to be a big job but  
22 I feel confident I can handle it," Johnson said at the time; and

23           WHEREAS, at the time of his interview for the position,  
24 Johnson was armed with proposals and a clear-cut sense of the  
25 direction which he wished to see the department progress. The  
26 duties of fire chief have never been more extensive than they were  
27 at the time, with the department's involvement in a number of  
28 ongoing projects such as the implementation of the 911 Emergency  
29 Communications Service and planning for hazardous materials  
30 emergency response; and

31           WHEREAS, Mr. Johnson's goal was to shift the department's  
32 emphasis toward fire prevention education and community service,  
33 with training officer funds shifting to hire an assistant for fire  
34 inspector to increase ongoing fire prevention education efforts  
35 and public relations-oriented programs, including smoke detectors  
36 for senior citizens and young people programs. He also  
37 established an agreement with the local hospital, where all  
38 firefighters become certified in cardiopulmonary resuscitation  
39 (CPR) annually and CPR training is offered free of charge to  
40 senior citizens and low-income residents in the community. Mr.  
41 Johnson has implemented a personnel administration for step  
42 promotions for departmental-required tenure and Fire Academy



43 courses. "One thing's for sure, I won't be sitting behind a  
44 desk," he said; and

45 WHEREAS, Willie Johnson was a great choice for Starkville's  
46 Fire Chief as he modernized the department, and it is with great  
47 pride that we recognize the contributions of this dedicated public  
48 servant who has brought honor to his department, his community and  
49 to the State of Mississippi:

50 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF  
51 MISSISSIPPI, That we do hereby remember the legacy of Willie  
52 Johnson as the first African American Fire Chief of Starkville,  
53 Mississippi, and join the citizens of Starkville in paying tribute  
54 to his service.

55 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That this resolution be presented to  
56 Willie Johnson and his family, forwarded to the Starkville Board  
57 of Aldermen, and made available to the Capitol Press Corps.

