

105TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. J. RES. 57

To authorize the Ralph David Abernathy Memorial Foundation to establish a memorial in the District of Columbia or its environs.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 27, 1997

Mr. LEWIS of Georgia (for himself, Mr. HASTINGS of Florida, Mrs. MEEK of Florida, Mr. WATTS of Oklahoma, Mr. SCOTT, Mr. DELLUMS, Mr. FROST, Mr. FILNER, Ms. MCKINNEY, Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA, Mr. DIXON, Ms. NORTON, Mr. BARRETT of Wisconsin, Mr. EVANS, Mr. GREEN, Mr. BONIOR, Mrs. MALONEY of New York, Mr. TOWNS, Ms. CHRISTIAN-GREEN, Mr. MORAN of Virginia, Ms. LOFGREN, Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas, Mr. ACKERMAN, Mr. HINCHEY, Mr. FOGLETTA, Mr. WALSH, Mr. BISHOP, Mr. WYNN, Mr. LIPINSKI, Mr. RUSH, and Mr. JEFFERSON) introduced the following joint resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Resources

JOINT RESOLUTION

To authorize the Ralph David Abernathy Memorial Foundation to establish a memorial in the District of Columbia or its environs.

Whereas, upheld and revered as a noble champion of the poor, Dr. Ralph David Abernathy dedicated his life, spiritually and physically, in service to the monumental ideals of justice and equality and led his people and his Nation along a path of righteous change; and fearless fighter in the war against injustice, poverty, and bigotry, he had

the conviction to lead and a vision to offer a country shackled by the chains of segregation;

Whereas, as the cofounder and coleader of the great American civil rights movement, Dr. Abernathy galvanized the conscience of a generation, changed the moral and social direction of a Nation, paved the way for millions of African Americans to realize the American Dream, and earned for himself a place of exaltation among the pantheon of American political and social leaders;

Whereas, recognized as inseparable friends and partners in life and inseparable heroes in death, the perfectly complementary natures of Dr. Abernathy and Dr. King propelled the movement forward with Dr. King articulating its nonviolent philosophy and Dr. Abernathy providing its strategy for success and its spiritual ballast; and the bond between them was indelibly strengthened during the more than 40 times that they were jailed together in their nonviolent quest for justice and equality;

Whereas the grandson of slaves, Ralph David Abernathy was born March 11, 1926, in Linden, Marengo County, Alabama as the 10th of the 12 children of William L. Abernathy, a farmer and a deacon, and Mrs. Louivory Valentine Abernathy, a devout Christian; and he attended high school at Linden Academy; enlisted in the military during World War II and rose to the rank of platoon sergeant; and upon his honorable discharge, enrolled at Alabama State College in Montgomery in 1945 where he became student body and class president and from which he graduated with high honors with a bachelor of arts degree; and he began his professional career in 1950 when he was appointed personnel director at Alabama State College and later assumed the position of dean of men

and professor of social studies; and in February 1952, he was called as the senior pastor of the historic First Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, where he served for a decade; and shortly after accepting this call, he married Juanita Odessa Jones of Uniontown, Alabama and to their union four children were born: Juandalynn Ralpheda, Donzaleigh Avis, Ralph David III, and Kwame Luthuli;

Whereas, as two young activist preachers in Montgomery, Alabama in 1956, Dr. Abernathy and Dr. King organized the Montgomery bus boycott which led to a successful year long boycott of that city's transit system, eventually ending Alabama's bus segregation and heralding the beginning of America's postwar civil rights movement; and Dr. Abernathy cofounded the Montgomery Improvement Association which was the forerunner of the Atlanta-based Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which he also cofounded in 1957;

Whereas the SCLC, which Dr. Abernathy served as financial secretary, treasurer, and vice-president at large, spearheaded the United States civil rights movement and helped to bring about passage of the landmark 1964 Civil Rights Act, the 1965 Voting Rights Act, and the abolition of Jim Crow segregation laws in Southern States; and for 13 turbulent years, from 1955 until Dr. King's death in 1968, Dr. Abernathy and Dr. King together were swept along by the movement of a fateful odyssey—to Atlanta, Albany, Birmingham, Washington, DC, St. Augustine, Selma, Chicago, and Memphis, and across the country—in a nonviolent quest to achieve justice for all mankind and to tear down the walls of segregation and discrimination;

Whereas, in addition to the resulting legislation, Dr. Abernathy was able to instill in millions of African Americans a new sense of pride and self-worth and the movement has served as an inspiration throughout the world as a model of principled, nonviolent struggle for freedom and equality; and remembered by those who were there as the tower of strength even in the darkest days of the movement, Dr. Abernathy endured with equanimity the bombing of his church and his home, the beatings, the arrests, the threats, even the selling of his family inheritance at public auction and still, for the sake of the downtrodden, walked undaunted along the dusty roads of southern towns crying “let my people go”;

Whereas it was Dr. Abernathy who cradled Dr. King in his arms as he took his last breath April 4, 1968, mortally wounded by an assassin’s bullet; and, upon assuming the presidency of the SCLC and the mantle of the American civil rights movement, Dr. Abernathy immediately began to implement plans for the Poor People’s Campaign in Washington, DC;

Whereas unprecedented in scope and objectives, the poor people’s campaign reflected Dr. Abernathy’s deeply held conviction that the key to the salvation and redemption of this Nation lay in its moral and humane response to the needs of its most oppressed and poverty-stricken citizens;

Whereas aiming to rub raw the Nation’s conscience on hunger and poverty, in the spring of 1968, Dr. Abernathy led thousands of the country’s hungry—black, brown, and white—from the hollows of Georgia, the swamps of Mississippi, the hills of Tennessee, the plains of the West,

the Eastside barrios of New York City, and the tenements of Chicago, in building Resurrection City in the Nation's Capital;

Whereas the poor people's campaign led to systemic changes in Government policies which now benefit millions of the financially underprivileged and to federally assisted programs which provide for the poor and the elderly;

Whereas Dr. Abernathy, through his close ties with labor as expressed in the Charleston, South Carolina Hospital Worker's Movement, brought a living wage and improved working conditions for thousands of hospital workers throughout the Nation; and he founded a nonprofit organization known as the Foundation for Economic Enterprises Development (FEED) through which he worked diligently to create jobs, job training, and business and trade opportunities for minorities in the United States;

Whereas, as documented by the honorable William Clay, United States Congressman from Missouri, in his book entitled "Just Permanent Interests," Dr. Abernathy was instrumental in building the groundswell of support for the enactment of the Federal Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday that started with a petition drive that resulted in 800,000 signatures in 1968, and upon reintroduction of the bill calling for such holiday in 1971, he launched a second petition drive that secured more than 3,000,000 signatures which he personally brought by train to the White House; his unflagging commitment contributed directly to the passage of the bill in 1983;

Whereas, during his lifetime, he addressed the United Nations and served as president of the World Peace Council, was awarded more than 300 citations and awards, 7 honorary doctoral degrees, and was a member of more than

40 organizations, including life membership in the NAACP, the World Commission on Hunger, the Presidential Council on Aging, the Atlanta Baptist Ministers Union, the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, and the American Sociological Society; and while actively involved in the movement, he completed his master's degree in sociology at Atlanta University;

Whereas he remained president of the SCLC for 9 years, from 1968 to 1977, and continued as president emeritus until his death in 1990; and he assumed the pastorate of the West Hunter Street Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia in 1961 and served as its senior pastor until the time of his death; and

Whereas Ralph David Abernathy, civil rights leader, minister, sociologist, pastor, husband, father, builder of dreams, humanitarian, distinguished American, died on April 17, 1990; and in honor and recognition of the extraordinary life and spirit of Ralph David Abernathy and his enduring contributions to the elevation of the human conscience and the improvement of the human condition in the United States and around the world and in gratitude for his sacrifices on behalf of the most cherished of our national ideals, freedom, and equality, we hereby support and approve the creation and erection of the Ralph David Abernathy Poor People's Memorial as a lasting tribute and a permanent reminder of our moral and humanitarian duties as individuals and as a Nation: Now, therefore, be it

- 1 *Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives*
- 2 *of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

1 **SECTION 1. AUTHORITY TO ESTABLISH MEMORIAL.**

2 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Ralph David Abernathy Me-
3 morial Foundation is authorized to establish a memorial
4 on Federal land in the District of Columbia to honor Dr.
5 Ralph David Abernathy and the poor people’s campaign.
6 The memorial shall be known as the Ralph David Aber-
7 nathy Poor People’s Memorial and shall be located in area
8 I between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington
9 Monument.

10 (b) COMPLIANCE WITH STANDARDS FOR COMMEMO-
11 RATIVE WORKS.—Except as provided in subsection (c)
12 and section 2(c), the establishment of the memorial shall
13 be in accordance with the Commemorative Works Act (40
14 U.S.C. 1001 et seq.).

15 (c) TWENTY-FIVE YEAR PERIOD INAPPLICABLE.—
16 Section 3(c) of the Commemorative Works Act shall not
17 apply to the memorial established under this Act.

18 **SEC. 2. PAYMENT OF EXPENSES.**

19 (a) CONSTRUCTION OF MEMORIAL.—The Ralph
20 David Abernathy Memorial Foundation shall be solely re-
21 sponsible for acceptance of contributions for, and payment
22 of the expenses of, the construction of the memorial.

23 (b) MAINTENANCE OF MEMORIAL.—Federal funds
24 may be used to pay expenses for the maintenance and
25 preservation of the memorial and its infrastructure.

1 (c) OFFSET OF COSTS OF MAINTENANCE OF MEMO-
2 RIAL INAPPLICABLE.—The offset of the costs of mainte-
3 nance and preservation of a memorial required in the first
4 sentence of section 8(b) of the Commemorative Works Act
5 shall not apply to the memorial established under this Act.

6 **SEC. 3. DEPOSIT OF EXCESS FUNDS.**

7 If, upon payment of all expenses of the construction
8 of the memorial, or upon expiration of the authority for
9 the memorial under section 10(b) of the Commemorative
10 Works Act, there remains a balance of funds received for
11 the construction of the memorial, the Ralph David Aber-
12 nathy Memorial Foundation shall transmit the amount of
13 the balance to the Secretary of the Treasury for deposit
14 in an account under section 8(b)(1) of such Act for main-
15 tenance and preservation of the memorial pursuant to sec-
16 tion 8(b)(2) of such Act.

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