

HOUSE RESOLUTION 169

By Towns

A RESOLUTION to honor and commend Bonnie Blair for her lifetime of work in support of civil rights.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that the members of this legislative body should specially recognize those estimable public servants who have dedicated themselves to promoting civilized working conditions, economic opportunity, and equality for all people; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Bonnie Blair is one such civil rights advocate; as the secretary for the business manager of the Retail Clerks Union, Local 1529, she played an instrumental role in the 1968 Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike; and

WHEREAS, after two African-American sanitation workers died on the job as a result of inhumane and unsafe conditions, Thomas Oliver "T.O." Jones, organizer and president of AFSCME Local 1733, called a meeting attended by thirty-three African-American sanitation workers and Memphis union leaders; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Jones requested that each sanitation worker sign a letter to the Mayor of Memphis requesting a meeting with him to discuss better working conditions and more respectful treatment from his supervisors; the task of drafting and typing these thirty-three letters fell to Mrs. Blair, who eagerly and efficiently completed the letters for the men's signatures; and

WHEREAS, after their request received a negative response from the Mayor, 1,300 African-American sanitation workers walked off their jobs on February 12, 1968, demanding that the city recognize their union and negotiate to resolve their grievances; and

WHEREAS, during the strike, Mrs. Blair and her husband, the late Taylor Blair, Jr., proudly marched with the Memphis AFL-CIO Labor Council; they were fortunate to be present twice when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke in support of the sanitation workers, including his famous Mountain Top speech, just before his assassination; and

WHEREAS, a cross was burned on the Blairs' lawn, but they refused to deny their Christian principles and continued to support the sanitation workers' cause and Dr. King's mediation efforts; and

WHEREAS, on April 4, 1968, Dr. King was shot and killed by an escaped convict as he stood on the balcony of his room at the Lorraine Motel; conversely, the violence of his tragic death did what the nonviolence of his methods could not: the strike was settled; and

WHEREAS, on April 16, 1968, union leaders and city officials reached an agreement, and the city council passed a resolution recognizing the union; the new contract for sanitation workers included a grievance procedure and staggered wage increases; members of AFSCME Local 1733 approved the agreement unanimously and ended their strike; and

WHEREAS, through her support of the 1968 Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike, Mrs. Blair helped usher in an era of improved working conditions and economic opportunity for African Americans during which our nation moved closer to the goal of equality for all people; and

WHEREAS, in the ensuing years, Bonnie Blair has continued to live and breathe at the intersection of workers' rights and civil rights; she recently received the "OPEN DOOR" Award from the April 4 Foundation of Memphis in recognition of her courage and integrity in the face of prejudice and discrimination; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Blair's stalwart support of civil rights is founded firmly in the roots of Christianity and her personal relationship with God; she is an ordained Ruling Elder at Farmington Presbyterian Church in Germantown and is currently serving on the Mission Committee of the Presbytery of the Mid-South; and

WHEREAS, she is a past Moderator of the Presbytery of the Mid-South and served for ten years on the Living Waters for the World Development Committee and its Personnel Committee in Franklin; and

WHEREAS, she also serves as Chaplain for America's Boating Club, a unit of a national boating organization that teaches safe boating on the high seas and inlet waterways; and

WHEREAS, for the past ten years, Mrs. Blair has served as Block Captain for the Germantown East Neighborhood Association; and

WHEREAS, in her professional life, Bonnie Blair was Hospital Director for St. Joseph Hospital in Memphis prior to her retirement; in this position, she oversaw eight departments with a staff of twenty-five and 150 volunteers and served on the Consortium of Bio-Medical Ethics for the Memphis area; and

WHEREAS, her many accomplishments aside, Mrs. Blair is fortunate to share both love and companionship with her daughters, Anne Blair Williams and Nancy Blair-Bonk; and

WHEREAS, Bonnie Blair is wholly committed to the noble precepts of loyalty and virtue that have earned Tennessee recognition as the Volunteer State, and she is worthy of our approbation; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, that we honor and commend Bonnie Blair for her lifetime of work in support of civil rights and workers' rights and salute her unswerving commitment to living the examined life with courage and conviction.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.