

RESOLUTION

A RESOLUTION SUPPORTING THE JOHN LEWIS COMMEMORATIVE TASK FORCE'S DESIGNATION OF THE FORMER SITE OF THE CONFEDERATE MONUMENT ON THE GROUNDS OF THE HISTORIC DEKALB COUNTY COURTHOUSE IN DECATUR, GEORGIA AS THE FUTURE MEMORIAL SITE HONORING CONGRESSMAN JOHN LEWIS

WHEREAS, inspired by the activism of the Montgomery Bus Boycott and radio broadcasts of Dr. Martin Luther King, John Lewis felt a moral obligation to stand up against injustice, doing so from a young age as a student at Fisk University; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Lewis participated with other civil rights leaders in the Nashville Student Movement, helped organize sit-ins at segregated lunch counters, and was one of the original Freedom Riders who challenged segregation on interstate buses; and

WHEREAS, in 1963, as chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Mr. Lewis was fundamental in the organization of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, and at just 23 years old, he was the youngest keynote speaker; and

WHEREAS, to bring attention to the struggles of African American voters in the South, Mr. Lewis led a march with Hosea Williams from Selma to Montgomery on March 7, 1965 where he and other marchers were met with violent attacks from state troopers; and

WHEREAS, the incident, which left Lewis with a fractured skull, later became known as "Bloody Sunday" and was responsible for accelerating the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Lewis believed that the vote was the most powerful nonviolent agent for change in a democracy, and under his leadership as Director of the Voter Education Project from 1970 to 1977, the organization added approximately four million minority voters to the rolls; and

WHEREAS, Congressman Lewis, who was elected to Congress a total of 17 times, was known as the "conscience of Congress" and is credited with, among other things, establishing the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C.; and

WHEREAS, John Lewis, the last surviving member of the "Big Six" civil rights icons, passed away in Atlanta, Georgia on July 17, 2020, at the age of 80 following a battle with stage IV pancreatic cancer; and

WHEREAS, the Governing Authority of DeKalb County desires to remember John Lewis as an American hero for his pivotal role in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's and his lifelong fight for human rights, dignity and equality as a Congressman representing Georgia's Fifth Congressional District for over 30 years; and

WHEREAS, the Governing Authority of DeKalb County further seeks to celebrate Mr. Lewis' remarkable life and the way in which he bridged the gap between earlier generations of civil rights activists and today's younger activists who are continuing to fight for justice and equality; and

WHEREAS, DeKalb County Commissioner Mereda Davis Johnson and City of Decatur Mayor Patti Garrett, created the John Lewis Commemorative Task Force ("Task Force"), which was initiated to determine the best and most appropriate means to honor the life and legacy of the late Congressman; and

WHEREAS, the Task Force has recommended that the former site of the Confederate Obelisk Monument ("Obelisk Monument") located on the grounds of the Historic DeKalb County Courthouse in Decatur, Georgia be used as the future memorial site honoring Congressman John Lewis; and

WHEREAS, the Obelisk Monument was located on the Decatur Square adjacent to historic DeKalb County Courthouse that now houses the DeKalb County History Center, which is a prominent and highly visible location within DeKalb County and the City of Decatur; and

WHEREAS, historical records indicate that the Obelisk Monument was erected in 1908 by the A. Evans Camp of the Confederate Veterans with funds raised by the Agnes Lee Chapter of the Daughters of the Confederacy; and

WHEREAS, the Obelisk Monument honors the soldiers of the Confederacy, but fails to address the violence, cruelty and inhumanity of slavery and their acts of sedition against the United States of America, the primary cause for which the Confederacy fought the Civil War; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to court order, the Obelisk Monument was found to be a public nuisance and was permanently removed from the grounds of the Historic DeKalb County Courthouse; and; and

WHEREAS, the Task Force believes that the most fitting way to commemorate John Lewis's life is to designate the area that once held the Obelisk Monument to be designated as the future site of a memorial honoring Mr. Lewis; and

WHEREAS, the area that once held the Obelisk Monument is unique as it sits wholly, both in the Congressional District Mr. Lewis represented for over thirty-three (33) years and in DeKalb County, Georgia, and in the City of Decatur, the county seat.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Governing Authority of DeKalb County supports the Task Force's recommendation to select that area that once held the Confederate Obelisk Monument on the grounds of the Historic DeKalb County Courthouse as the future site of a memorial dedicated to the legacy of Congressman John Lewis.

ADOPTED by the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners, this ____ day of _____, 2021.

STEPHEN R. BRADSHAW
Presiding Officer
Board of Commissioners
DeKalb County, Georgia

APPROVED by the Chief Executive Officer of DeKalb County, this ____ day of _____, 2021.

MICHAEL L. THURMOND
Chief Executive Officer
DeKalb County, Georgia

ATTEST:

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

BARBARA SANDERS-NORWOOD, CCC
Clerk

VIVIANE H. ERNSTES
County Attorney