

2020 Second Extraordinary Session

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 20

BY SENATORS FOIL AND MORRIS

CONDOLENCES. Expresses sincere condolences upon the death of Sylvia Bernadette Sullivan Duke.

1 A RESOLUTION

2 To express the sincere condolences of the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana upon the
3 death of Sylvia Bernadette Sullivan Duke.

4 WHEREAS, it is with profound sorrow that the members and staff of the Senate of
5 the Legislature of Louisiana have learned of the death from COVID-19 complications on
6 Sunday, October 11, 2020, of friend and former colleague, Sylvia Bernadette Sullivan Duke,
7 a native of Baton Rouge known as "Mama Syl", at age eighty-three; and

8 WHEREAS, born on November 7, 1936, Sylvia was the oldest daughter of Sidney
9 James and Willie Christine Davis Sullivan and after graduating from Istrouma High School
10 in 1954, she married her high school sweetheart, Gene, and they began a life to be cherished
11 by all who have loved and been inspired by her; and

12 WHEREAS, she began her working career with an advertising agency, later moving
13 to state government as secretary to Governor John McKeithen for eight years, and then to
14 the Louisiana State Senate for twenty-three years, its first full-time employee, as a secretary,
15 administrative assistant, and administrative officer, retiring in May 1996; and

16 WHEREAS, Sylvia's contributions were tied to some of the more important events
17 in Senate history, including the development of Senate offices and committee rooms,
18 individual Capitol offices and apartments at the Pentagon Barracks for members, the first

1 election of a member of the Senate as president, the implementation of a dining room for
2 Senators, the creation of a full-service full-time Senate staff; and automation of the
3 legislative process; and through her unfailing loyalty to the Senate left an indelible mark on
4 not only those fortunate enough to know her but for all who walk in the halls of the Capitol
5 after her who will feel the lasting impact of her legacy; and

6 WHEREAS, while with the Senate, Sylvia was very active in the National
7 Conference of State Legislatures, including serving on its Executive Board, and was a
8 primary force in the Louisiana Legislature hosting the 1986 and 1994 NCSL Annual
9 Meetings in New Orleans; and

10 WHEREAS, a woman of many interests, during her demanding career and until her
11 passing, Syl tirelessly contributed her time, ideas, and energy to myriad community
12 organizations; and

13 WHEREAS, for the less fortunate she served on the Board of Directors of the Iris
14 Domestic Violence Center, helped start the prisoner trustee program providing societal
15 re-entry work opportunities for inmates, served on the Board of the Baton Rouge Regional
16 Eye Bank, and served as a trained volunteer for Prevent Child Abuse in Louisiana — at one
17 point earning their "volunteer of the year" award; and

18 WHEREAS, for greater involvement of women in government, Syl helped secure
19 initial funding for the Louisiana Center for Women and Government, as well as serving on
20 its Board of Directors, served on the Louisiana Task Force for the Talent Bank of Women
21 under two governors, and joined former U.S. Senator John Breaux to work on his Women's
22 Advisory Committee, but declined an opportunity to run for the Senate because she said she
23 could do more as a private citizen than with "only one vote" on issues as a public official;
24 and

25 WHEREAS, ever active in the community, she helped bring the Hot Air Balloon
26 Festival to Baton Rouge, worked with the Louisiana Historical Society, Magnolia Cemetery
27 Restoration, Old Governors' Mansion, and Old State Capitol, and supported the development
28 of the Pennington Biomedical Research Center; and

29 WHEREAS, her involvement with LSU was remarkable -- a founding member of the
30 Bengal Belles, volunteer for the Women's Gymnastics and the Women's Golf teams,

1 countless hours spent volunteering at University Laboratory School on the Grandparents
2 Committee and in her grandchildren's classrooms, as well as providing financial support to
3 the university with her husband, Gene, in areas such as a professorship in the College of
4 Human Sciences and Education, and funding a scholarship to the College of Engineering;
5 and

6 WHEREAS, Sylvia was a member of First United Methodist Church of Baton Rouge
7 and a lifelong member of the Order of the Eastern Star; and

8 WHEREAS, she was preceded in death by her parents; an infant brother, Roy, and
9 her younger brother Sidney James Sullivan Jr.; and

10 WHEREAS, she is survived by her devoted husband of sixty-four years, Alton
11 Eugene Duke; three sons, Stacy and wife Rickie, Steve and wife Barbara, and Stuart and her
12 former daughter-in-law Anne Duke; five granddaughters, Dr. Taylor Duke Deustch and
13 husband Carter Deustch, Leighton Duke, Haley Duke Babb and husband J.D. Babb, Heather
14 Duke Pocic and husband Ethan Pocic, and Hannah Duke; three grandsons, Hunter, William,
15 and Zachary; three great-granddaughters Harper and Lottie Babb and Ellie Pocic; nieces,
16 Ashley and husband Christian True, Laura Gail Sullivan, and Donna-Sue and husband Jude
17 Dugas; four nephews, Sidney and wife Wendy Wall, Kelly and wife Isabel Sullivan, Sidney
18 and wife Pam Sullivan, and David Sullivan; her "sisters of the heart" Debra Russell, Tanya
19 Hooks, and Beverly Walton; and many other close family and friends; and

20 WHEREAS, Sylvia Bernadette Sullivan Duke was a model wife, mother,
21 grandmother, great-grandmother, community leader, volunteer, and humanitarian; she was
22 fiercely loyal, generously loving, and exceedingly kind; she was a great lady and outstanding
23 community servant; and she created an incredible, memorable, well-lived, well-loved life
24 of commitment to her family and community, and will always be remembered for her love
25 of family and many passions in life, and accomplishments that were achieved by her own
26 hand which resulted in a most fascinating and distinguished life; and

27 WHEREAS, as Sylvia is remembered, "Say not in grief that she is no more, but live
28 in thankfulness that she was".

29 THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana
30 does hereby express its heartfelt sympathies at the passing of Sylvia Bernadette Sullivan

1 Duke, an outstanding public and community servant; does hereby record for posterity her
2 significant contributions to the Louisiana Senate through her outstanding abilities,
3 leadership, able assistance, her noteworthy contributions to the Baton Rouge community,
4 Louisiana State University, and the state of Louisiana; and does hereby express enduring
5 gratitude for her life so devoted to her family and to the public good.

6 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be transmitted to
7 Sylvia's husband, Gene Duke.

The original instrument and the following digest, which constitutes no part
of the legislative instrument, were prepared by Jerry J. Guillot.

DIGEST

SR 20 Original

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