

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 15

BY SENATOR MORRISH

A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

To commend Milton Vanicor for his passion, devotion, and his nearly eighty-year commitment to Cajun music.

WHEREAS, on the same day the armistice was signed ending World War I, November 11, 1918, a third baby, Milton, was born to Jules and Hermina Vanicor in the tiny community of Prairie Hayes, Louisiana, near the town of Church Point; and

WHEREAS, Milton Vanicor grew up helping his parents and siblings provide for the family by subsistence farming as the family grew cotton as a cash crop; grain, primarily, to feed their animals; and vegetables, primarily, to feed the family; and

WHEREAS, music, particularly traditional Cajun music, played at social gatherings called *bals de maison*, was an integral part of the recreation provided for the inhabitants of Prairie Hayes and surrounding areas and Milton Vanicor was privileged to hear and enjoy the performances of such great Cajun musicians as Amadee Ardoin, an accordionist, and Dennis McGee, a fiddler; and

WHEREAS, with money available for only the barest of necessities for the Vanicor family, a fiddle for young Milton was out of the question, but he was determined to create his own instrument; and

WHEREAS, using a plank from his father's barnyard, wire from his uncle who made brooms, and a Prince Albert tobacco can, Milton Vanicor designed and fashioned his own fiddle and his father produced a bow from a green tree branch and horse hair for string; and

WHEREAS, with pine sap serving as rosin for the bow, Milton Vanicor had a usable fiddle and bow and he set about teaching himself to play the homemade instrument; and

WHEREAS, during the chaos of the Great Depression of the 1930's, Mr. Vanicor came to attend these local *bals de maison* as a means to meet and socialize with other young people his age and at one of these gatherings he saw a beautiful young Cajun girl, Odile Bellard, who caught his eye and his attention; and

WHEREAS, following a brief courtship, Odile Bellard became Mrs. Milton Vanicor

on January 30, 1937; and

WHEREAS, the Great Depression brought moves to Lake Charles, Louisiana, and, finally, to Lacassine, Louisiana, for Odile and Milton Vanicor while they continued to farm cotton and work for local rice farmers along their way; and

WHEREAS, World War II interrupted life for the young Vanicors, as with most Americans of this time, and Milton was drafted into the United States Navy and served aboard the *USS Newberry* in the Pacific Theater of the war, including participation in the invasions of Iwo Jima and Okinawa and in the occupation of Japan; and

WHEREAS, following his service with the occupation forces in Japan, and upon receiving an honorable discharge from the U.S. Navy, Milton Vanicor returned to his beloved wife, Odile, southwest Louisiana, the life of a farmer, and his music; and

WHEREAS, having longed to play his cherished Cajun music during his time serving in the Pacific, but also knowing that there was no extra money for a fiddle, Milton and Odile Vanicor felled a tree near their home and, after much scraping and carving, Milton Vanicor once again had a fiddle to play and he spent many wintry evenings around the stove with Odile, playing and dancing to the Cajun music they both loved; and

WHEREAS, Milton Vanicor eventually joined brothers Ellis and Ivy, nephew Orsy Vanicor, and brother-in-law, Asa LeJeune, adding his fiddle music to their guitar and steel guitar sounds; and

WHEREAS, in 1948, Iry LeJeune, Odile's first cousin and, despite the handicap of being blind, a legendary accordionist and vocalist, came to live with the Vanicors which led to the men forming the *Lacassine Playboys* band playing the traditional Cajun music and acting as a back-up band for Iry and the *Lacassine Playboys* were quite successful and Milton Vanicor played on such legendary Iry LeJeune recordings as *Grand Nuit Special*, *Bayou Pon Pon*, and *La Valse de Grande Chemin*; and

WHEREAS, with the *Lacassine Playboys* and Iry LeJeune as vocalist, the band entertained at dances across southwest Louisiana, enjoying a good bit of notoriety in the area, but with the demands of playing music at late night dances colliding with the need to support a family, Milton Vanicor turned from the music night life to focus on providing for his family; and

WHEREAS, shortly after Milton Vanicor retreated from the life of music as a first priority, the brief period of exceptional success for the *Lacassine Playboys* came to a tragic end with the death of Iry LeJeune, who was struck down while on the side of the road helping to fix a flat on a foggy October night; and

WHEREAS, Milton Vanicor put away his fiddle except for family gatherings and concentrated on life with Odile and their children and, following a catastrophic flood in 1953, Milton turned to learning carpentry and construction skills, in order to build homes for the large number of returning veterans and their families; and

WHEREAS, before long, Milton Vanicor had founded his own construction business, employing and educating members of his family in order that they could earn a living for themselves and their families; and

WHEREAS, once the members of his family mastered the skills of construction, Milton Vanicor provided his brothers, sons, nephews, and, eventually, his grandsons with a way to earn a living, building homes in Jefferson Davis, Calcasieu, Cameron, and Allen parishes in southwest Louisiana; and

WHEREAS, after years in the building business, Milton Vanicor retired from his career in construction and he turned again to his love of Cajun music and playing the fiddle, often playing again for Odile in the kitchen of their home; and

WHEREAS, a retired Milton Vanicor began playing his traditional Cajun music in nursing homes to entertain the residents and their families and, soon, interest in his style of music began to grow among new generations of young people, influencing both younger and future musicians in the area; and

WHEREAS, after listening to Milton Vanicor's music, these young musicians began integrating this traditional style into their repertoire, and, soon Vanicor was invited to play at festivals and music camps such as the Balfa Cajun Music camp at Lake Fausse and at Bayou Chicot State Park where he was a featured performer; and

WHEREAS, with the loss of his beloved Odile in 2008, Milton Vanicor filled the void with music and began attending the Saturday morning jam sessions at Marc Savoy's Savoy Music Club in Eunice, Louisiana; and

WHEREAS, in 2011 and 2012 Milton Vanicor was featured in Savoy's jammer

entourage at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, known as Jazz Fest; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Vanicor played at festivals and he served for three years on the staff at the Centrum American Fiddle Tunes Festival in Port Townsend, Washington, where he played music and, also demonstrated how to make a roux and gumbo and at his first appearance at the festival in 2012, Milton Vanicor was joined onstage by his daughter, Linda Mercantel, and the Vanicors were a great hit with the crowds of fans; and

WHEREAS, following the appearance at Fiddle Tunes, Cajun music devotees were clamoring for a Milton Vanicor album of this historic music and Chris Miller, 2012 winner of the "Accordionist of the Year" award given by the Cajun French Music Association (CFMA), was enlisted to assist in the making of the album; and

WHEREAS, Miller recorded the album at Milton Vanicor's home, complete with the sounds of a train traveling along the nearby railroad tracks in the background of several tracks on the album and at the age of ninety-five, Vanicor released his first ever album, *Un Souvenir de Milton Vanicor*, in July 2013 to the delight of his many fans; and

WHEREAS, in October 2013, Milton Vanicor joined Miller and his band, Bayou Roots, onstage at the *Festivals Acadiens et Creoles* in Lafayette for a live performance; and

WHEREAS, with the resurgence of his musical career in his nineties, Milton Vanicor continues to entertain new generations of music lovers with his traditional Cajun music and with his warm, friendly persona, still the young man who enlisted his father's assistance to make his first violin and bow and the gentleman that Odile fell in love with nearly eighty years ago.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby commend Milton Vanicor for his passion, devotion, and nearly eighty-year commitment to Cajun music.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be transmitted to Milton Vanicor.

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PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE

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SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES