

Senate Resolution 408

By: Senators Jones of the 10th and James of the 35th

A RESOLUTION

1 Honoring the life and memory of Herman Jerome "HJ" Russell, Sr.; and for other purposes.

2 WHEREAS, the State of Georgia mourns the loss of one of its most distinguished citizens
3 with the passing of Herman Jerome "HJ" Russell, Sr., on November 15, 2014; and

4 WHEREAS, HJ was born on December 23, 1930, in the Summerhill Community of Atlanta,
5 Georgia, the youngest son of Maggie Goodson Russell and Rogers Russell, Sr.; and

6 WHEREAS, his spirit of entrepreneurship emerged early; he had a paper route and opened
7 a shoeshine parlor while he was still in elementary school; and

8 WHEREAS, he attended David T. Howard High School and during summers worked with
9 his father as a subcontractor, learning to be a master tradesman and mechanic; he followed
10 his father's advice to save a portion of every dollar earned, and by the age of 16, he saved
11 enough money to purchase a vacant lot from the City of Atlanta, where he built his first
12 rental property, a duplex; and

13 WHEREAS, HJ worked as a plasterer while earning a degree in building construction from
14 Tuskegee Institute in Alabama (later Tuskegee University); and

15 WHEREAS, while still a senior at Tuskegee, HJ established the business that would be
16 known as H.J. Russell & Company, and after graduation, he returned to Atlanta and began
17 his career, providing real estate services that included plastering, property management, and
18 construction; and

19 WHEREAS, he and his late wife, Otelia, developed strong relationships with many key
20 individuals at the forefront of the Civil Rights Movement, most notably Martin Luther King,
21 Jr., and his family to whom they opened their home and provided a safe haven away from
22 the media spotlight during the tumultuous times of the 1960s; and

23 WHEREAS, HJ's civic involvement brought him into lasting relationships with many of
24 Atlanta's prominent politicians, business leaders, and Civil Rights activists, including Atlanta
25 Mayor Ivan Allen; Georgia Senator Leroy Johnson; political activist QV Williamson;
26 renowned Atlanta businessman Jesse Hill, Jr.; and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and his
27 family; and

28 WHEREAS, during the 1970s, he became the largest single owner and manager of HUD
29 apartments in Georgia, developed, owned, and constructed over \$150 million of real estate,
30 and acquired interests in Citizens Trust Bank, an ABC affiliate television station, a beverage
31 distribution company, airport concessions, insurance, and other ventures; and

32 WHEREAS, in 1974, he co-chaired the finance committee to elect Maynard Jackson as
33 Atlanta's first black mayor; and

34 WHEREAS, he retired from H.J. Russell & Company in 2003 but continued to devote his
35 energies to his legacy projects in the Castleberry Hill area, which included Paschal's
36 Restaurant; and

37 WHEREAS, his autobiography, *Building Atlanta*, will be released in April of 2015; and

38 WHEREAS, an active philanthropist, he supported a wide range of worthy causes, including
39 education in the form of multi-million-dollar pledges to Atlanta area colleges and his alma
40 mater, Tuskegee University; and

41 WHEREAS, in 1991, he received the prestigious Horatio Alger Award, recognizing
42 dedicated community leaders who demonstrate individual initiative and a commitment to
43 excellence; and

44 WHEREAS, his legacy will live forever through his wonderful children, Donata Russell
45 Major, H. Jerome Russell, and Michael Russell.

46 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE that the members of this body
47 join in honoring the life and memory of Herman Jerome "HJ" Russell, Sr., express their
48 deepest and most sincere regret at his passing, and commend him for his outstanding
49 leadership to the citizens of the State of Georgia.

50 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Secretary of the Senate is authorized and directed
51 to make an appropriate copy of this resolution available for distribution to the family of
52 Herman Jerome "HJ" Russell, Sr.