

2023 Regular Session

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 15

BY REPRESENTATIVE DAVIS

A RESOLUTION

To commend the Louisiana Art & Science Museum (LASM) on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of its Irene W. Pennington Planetarium.

WHEREAS, in 1967, the city-parish of Baton Rouge and The Committee for a Better Baton Rouge funded the construction of a Zeiss planetarium to complement the then-named Louisiana Arts and Science Center (LASC) that was housed in the Old Governor's Mansion; and

WHEREAS, in 1971, the International Planetarium Society (IPS) drafted its constitution and bylaws in the LASC planetarium, which was the twelfth-largest planetarium in the world at the time; and

WHEREAS, in 1998, the LASM entered into an agreement with the state of Louisiana and the city-parish of Baton Rouge to fund a \$16.8 million project to build a planetarium, atrium, educational classrooms, and galleries at the museum's current location; and

WHEREAS, in 1999, the Irene W. and C. B. Pennington Foundation funded an endowment to support the operations of the planetarium; in 2001, ExxonMobil contributed to the planetarium the largest single educational donation the corporation had ever made to the Baton Rouge community; and

WHEREAS, on May 22, 2003, the Louisiana Art & Science Museum officially opened the Irene W. Pennington Planetarium and ExxonMobil Space Theater; the planetarium, with its sixty-foot dome and one hundred seventy-one seat theater, remains the largest and most technologically advanced planetarium in the southeastern United States; and

WHEREAS, the LASM's economic impact on Baton Rouge grew significantly as a result of the opening of the new Irene W. Pennington Planetarium; the planetarium caused the average daily attendance at the LASM to quadruple, which also led to the doubling of the museum's operating budget; the state-of-the-art planetarium draws not only community members and tourists, but also tens of thousands of students seeking to add to their school field trip experience; and

WHEREAS, in 2012, the Irene W. Pennington Planetarium hosted the IPS's twenty-first biennial conference, which brought nearly seven hundred planetarium professionals from forty-four countries to Baton Rouge; and

WHEREAS, in 2020, the LASM survived the COVID-19 pandemic; during the height of the pandemic, the planetarium brightened the lives of hundreds of individuals through weekly online livestreams of the "We Need Our Space" planetarium experience, which was provided to patrons entirely free of charge in the safety of their homes; and

WHEREAS, in 2021, the LASM presented "Astronomy Virtual Voyages" to more than twelve hundred fifth-grade students from struggling schools within the East Baton Rouge Parish School System; the program featured live, presenter-led explorations of the nighttime sky and other hands-on activities; and

WHEREAS, this year, the Irene W. Pennington Planetarium celebrated a landmark occasion by admitting its one-millionth visitor; many of those visitors have been students from nearly forty Louisiana parishes and five Mississippi counties, all of whom experience curriculum-aligned educational programs that are focused on not only astronomy, but also important topics such as engineering, history, culture, and the environment; and

WHEREAS, the LASM is also celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the Irene W. Pennington Planetarium by lighting the exterior of the planetarium dome on May 26, 2023, and presenting an "Out of this World" themed gala on October 6, 2023, to raise funds for the museum's capital campaign to renovate four of the LASM's hands-on, STEAM-based spaces; and

WHEREAS, in 2025, the LASM will celebrate the one-hundredth anniversary of its historic building, which is the renovated Illinois Central Railroad passenger station built in 1925 by the Yazoo and Mississippi Valley Railroad Company which has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1994; and

WHEREAS, both the LASM and the Irene W. Pennington Planetarium are most deserving of the highest recognition on the occasion of the planetarium's twentieth anniversary.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the House of Representatives of the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby commend the Louisiana Art & Science Museum on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of its Irene W. Pennington Planetarium; does hereby recognize the Irene W. Pennington Planetarium's pivotal role in advancing Louisiana's educational, cultural, and economic development by providing opportunities to learn, explore, and discover under its awe-inspiring, sixty-foot dome; and does hereby extend sincerest wishes that the LASM continue to receive the necessary support to continue its truly inspiring mission of education.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be transmitted to the chair of the board, Elizabeth Canfield, and the executive director of the Louisiana Art & Science Museum.

SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES