

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 119

BY SENATOR MIZELL

A RESOLUTION

To express the sincere condolences of the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana upon the death of Earl Michael Willis.

WHEREAS, it is with deep regret and profound sorrow that the members of the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana have learned of the passing of Earl "Michael" Willis on May 16, 2021, at age twenty-seven; and

WHEREAS, Theodore Roosevelt wrote that "Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in a gray twilight that knows no victory nor defeat ..."; and

WHEREAS, to anyone who ever met Michael Willis, these words described his life to the fullest as he lived more completely during his twenty-seven years of life than most people live in a whole lifetime; and

WHEREAS, Earl Michael Willis, the beloved son of Earl Raymond and Cristal Faye Willis, was born on May 29, 1993 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and

WHEREAS, Michael grew up in West Baton Rouge Parish, in his small hometown of Brusly, Louisiana, attended Holy Family School in Port Allen from Kindergarten to 8th grade, and graduated from Catholic High School in Baton Rouge; and

WHEREAS, being reared in a small, close knit community, the tremendous influence of his parents, and his catholic schooling, Michael developed a strong and relentless faith and belief in God; his Christian faith and values were part of his everyday life; and

WHEREAS, Michael lived and breathed a love and devotion for the Heavenly Father and his faith was cemented through his friendship with Father Michael Allelo, who Michael loved not only as a spiritual guidepost but his cherished friend; and

WHEREAS, it is said that there are a few events in a person's life that characterize their entire life, such was the case with Michael for when he was in middle school, his older sister, Rachael Lynn, was diagnosed with cancer and at the age of twenty-four passed away from cancer; and

WHEREAS, Michael was fourteen years old at the time of Rachael Lynn's passing and since then, he did much to honor her memory and pay tribute, love, and devotion to his older sister; and

WHEREAS, he and his family participated in many Light the Night events organized by the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, and recently, Michael and his wife, Megan, established a nonprofit foundation named Running for Rachael; and

WHEREAS, in December 2018, Michael set a personal goal of raising \$25,000 for cancer research and to run a 100-mile marathon to honor the memory of his sister; and

WHEREAS, on Sunday, May 16, 2021, prior to his untimely death, Michael reached part of his goal as he successfully completed the Key 100 Ultra Marathon in Key West, Florida, running one hundred miles, at a pace of twelve minutes/mile and completed the race after running twenty hours and twenty-nine minutes, placing tenth overall, sixth in male (overall) and first in his age division; one of one hundred ninety-nine runners, he finished ninety-fifth; and

WHEREAS, Michael had a tremendous passion for advocacy which began while working as a high schooler at River Road Day Care, in Port Allen, his entire adulthood was devoted to advocating for causes that were important to him; and

WHEREAS, during the summer of 2014, Michael worked as an intern for the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons in their Washington DC office and also as an intern for Congressman Bill Cassidy in his Washington, DC office; and

WHEREAS, for a Louisiana boy who had spent each summer fishing in Grand Isle, he truly missed spending the summer in Louisiana yet, he had made a commitment to working full-time as an intern in DC to gain more experience and knowledge; and

WHEREAS, from February 2014 until August 2017, Michael served as the Director of Business Development for Cindy Bishop at Checkmate Strategies, an association management and lobbying firm headquartered in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where he became a registered lobbyist and advocated for issues on behalf of orthopedic surgeons, surgery centers, justices of the peace and constables, athletic trainers, school-based health clinics, child care centers, and the meat processors; and he conducted workshops on how to advocate in the nonprofit sector; and

WHEREAS, he graduated from Louisiana State University in May 2015 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Political Science; during his time at LSU, Michael was an active member of the Phi Kappa Psi Fraternity serving as President of the Pledge Class, Chaplain, and Head of the Judicial Board; and

WHEREAS, from September 2017 until January 2020, Michael served as the South Louisiana Field Representative for Congressman Ralph Abraham and traveled the state to help constituents from East and West Feliciana parishes to Washington Parish to St. Helena and Tangipahoa parishes; and

WHEREAS, as Vice President of Policy for The Center for Development and Learning, he led CDL's very successful "Literacy and Economic Development" Summit on April 7, 2021, planned and led a highly successful "Literacy Day at the Capitol" on May 6, and had begun to plan for a series of regional conversations on the intersection of literacy and economic development to begin in September and take place throughout the state and, at the time of his sudden and untimely passing, he was working on important early literacy issues; and

WHEREAS, on April 17, 2020, Michael married the love of his life, Megan Voda, and they certainly define love conquers all as they had a connection unlike any other; and

WHEREAS, they laughed together, inspired each other, and challenged one another to grow, both collectively and individually; they respected each other's aspirations, conquering them together as one; and

WHEREAS, their marriage occurred at the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic, so their wedding was not what they had planned but was exactly what they deserved; a day full of love and pure joy with the people that meant the most to them; and

WHEREAS, his love and devotion for his mom Cristal, his dad "King Earl", his cousins Tessa and Lacey, his beloved nephews Beau and Harrison, his nieces Lilly and Caroline, his half-brother Nicholas, his sister-in-law Katie Voda, his mother-in-law Cris Voda, his father-in-law Tim Voda and his many uncles, aunts, and cousins was immeasurable; and

WHEREAS, spending quality time with his beloved wife Megan, his loyal and dedicated friends, and his loving family was always at the top of Michael's priority list; his

parents taught Michael family values and showed him unconditional love; his mother taught him the value of service to his community and others; and his father Earl instilled in Michael a profound love and appreciation of Louisiana's culture, especially fishing and hunting; and

WHEREAS, Michael was preceded in death by his sister, Rachael Willis; paternal grandparents, Mildred Ourso Willis Burleigh and Ferrel Lee Willis; maternal grandparents, Julia and Claiborne Simoneaux; and his beloved dog, Colonel; and

WHEREAS, he is survived by his wife Megan; parents Earl and Cristal Willis; brother Nicholas Boudreaux; nephews, Noah and Nicholas Boudreaux; mother and father in-law Cris and Tim Voda; sister-in-law Katie Voda; aunts Chenny LeBlanc, Brandon and Kay Willis, Skip and Andrea Cleveland, Claiborne Simoneaux Jr., and Stephanie Palmer; and numerous cousins including Lacey Ellis (Bob) and Tessa Danna (Patrick); and "honorary" nieces and nephews Beau and Lilly Seymour, Caroline and Harrison Danna; and his beloved dog Huey; and

WHEREAS, Michael Willis was loving, inspiring, motivational, sweet, positive, one of-a kind, perpetually upbeat, fun, someone with a heart of gold, and an incredible man who made people feel loved, valued, and appreciated; and

WHEREAS, while Michael's accomplishments in his twenty-seven years were many, he is most remembered for his big smile, larger than life personality, bear hugs, and his devotion to his wife, family, and his faith were an inspiration to all those he met.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby express sincere condolences upon the death of Earl Michael Willis, does hereby extend heartfelt sympathies to his family, and does hereby recognize that the memories of this extraordinary man shall live forever in the minds and hearts of all who knew and loved him.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be transmitted to Earl Michael Willis' wife, Megan Willis, and his parents, Earl Raymond and Cristal Faye Willis.

PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE