

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 530

By Hardaway

A RESOLUTION to honor Dr. James Netters for his historic service to the City of Memphis as one of the first African-American councilmen.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that the members of this General Assembly should salute those citizens who, through their extraordinary efforts, have distinguished themselves as community leaders of whom we can all be proud; and

WHEREAS, one such noteworthy person is Dr. James Netters, Senior Pastor of Mt. Vernon Baptist Church, who was one of the first African Americans to win election to the Memphis City Council; and

WHEREAS, a native of Aliceville, Alabama, Dr. James Netters is the oldest son of Phillip and Bessie Ball Netters. A resident of Memphis since 1942, Dr. Netters graduated from Booker T. Washington High School in 1946; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Netters earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology from LeMoyne-Owen College in 1963 and attended Memphis Theological Seminary, from which he earned a Master of Divinity degree in 1987 and a Doctor of Ministry degree in 1994; and

WHEREAS, answering his call to the ministry, Dr. Netters was ordained by Reverend L.O. Taylor at Olivet Baptist Church in 1955 and was installed as pastor at Mt. Vernon Baptist Church in October 1956, at which time he began ministering to the youth and the larger community; and

WHEREAS, after completing his undergraduate education in 1963, he accepted a teaching position with Memphis City Schools and became active in the Civil Rights Movement. He traveled to Washington, D.C., and was on stage as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech; and

WHEREAS, the following year, Dr. Netters was among the first persons arrested during the bus sit-in demonstrations in Memphis, which led to the integration of the city buses just weeks later; and

WHEREAS, in a truly historic moment for the City of Memphis, Dr. James Netters won election to the new Memphis City Council in 1967, becoming one of the council's first three African-American councilmen; and

WHEREAS, during his first year as councilman, the sanitation strike began, bringing national labor and civil rights leaders, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to Memphis. Dr. Netters worked tirelessly in public and behind the scenes, ultimately playing an instrumental role in working out an agreement to end the strike, which, unfortunately, Dr. King did not live to see resolved; and

WHEREAS, completing his service on the council in 1971, Dr. James Netters then became the first African American to serve as an administrative assistant to a Mayor of the City of Memphis, serving with Mayor Wyeth Chandler from 1972 to 1975; and

WHEREAS, a longtime member of the board of commissioners of Memphis Light, Gas, and Water Division, Dr. Netters served a tenure there as interim president and chief executive officer; the "James L. Netters Business Center" at the utility is named in his honor; and

WHEREAS, he has rendered sterling service as a member of the Regional Medical Center Clerical Advisory Board and the Progressive National Baptist Convention; and

WHEREAS, no stranger to awards and accolades for his service in religious, civil, and political capacities, Dr. Netters has received honorary doctorates from Oral Roberts University and LeMoyne-Owen College. Of special note is the establishment of the Dr. James L. Netters Professorship and Faculty Chair of Rhetoric and African American Studies at Memphis Theological Seminary; and

WHEREAS, devoted to his family, Dr. Netters enjoyed the love and support of his beloved wife, Leona Jones Netters, with whom he enjoyed fifty-seven years of marriage before her passing in 2005; he is the proud father of Edwinta, James Jr., and Chandra; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Netters's outstanding success as a public servant and community leader is directly attributable to his reliance on the time-honored values of hard work and common sense and his uncommon ability to work well with and relate to people from all walks of life; and

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly find it appropriate to pause in their deliberations to acknowledge and applaud Dr. James Netters for his dedication to the City of Memphis and its citizens; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED TENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we hereby honor Dr. James Netters for his historic service to the City of Memphis as one of the first African-American councilmen and extend to him our best wishes for every future success.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.