

House Resolution 1001

By: Representatives McClain of the 100th, Nguyen of the 89th, Gilliard of the 162nd, Cannon of the 58th, and Hugley of the 136th

A RESOLUTION

1 Honoring the 50th anniversary of the death of sanitation workers Echol Cole and Robert
2 Walker and celebrating the victorious strike of the Memphis sanitation workers; and for other
3 purposes.

4 WHEREAS, in Memphis, Tennessee, on February 1, 1968, newly hired sanitation workers,
5 29-year-old Robert Walker and 35-year-old Echol Cole, were riding in the back of a wiener
6 barrel, taking shelter from the rain in its compacting mechanism, when they were killed due
7 to unsafe and inadequate working conditions; and

8 WHEREAS, such trucks were already known to be outdated and dangerous; back in 1964,
9 two garbage workers were killed when a defective compactor caused a wiener barrel to flip
10 over; and

11 WHEREAS, the continued use of these death machines was only one of the many reasons
12 that Memphis sanitation workers organized a union with an accompanied strike if necessary;
13 and

14 WHEREAS, there was little reporting done the morning after Echol Cole and Robert Walker
15 were killed, and as a result the cruelty and injustice behind their untimely deaths were unable
16 to be properly relayed to the public; and

17 WHEREAS, there was also no mention that the families of these two men had no money to
18 bury them, that they did not receive workers' compensation, and that they had no insurance
19 or pension; and

20 WHEREAS, the City of Memphis had no contractual obligation to compensate the widows
21 of Robert Walker and Echol Cole and only gave their families one month's salary and
22 \$500.00 to go towards their burial expenses; and

23 WHEREAS, on February 12, 1968, 1,300 employees from Memphis' sanitation, sewer, and
24 drainage departments went on strike against working conditions and economics, and although
25 the deaths of Robert Walker and Echol Cole provided the catalyst needed to inspire the strike
26 organizers, they long had a list of grievances which stretched far beyond the immediate issue
27 of safety; and

28 WHEREAS, it wasn't long before this strike began to garner national attention and the
29 workers began to gain national support; and

30 WHEREAS, on March 14, 1968, Roy Wilkins, NAACP executive director, and Bayard
31 Rustin of the A. Philip Randolph Institute addressed more than 9,000 people at Mason
32 Temple, and on March 18, 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr., made his first appearance in
33 Memphis, supporting the strikers at a rally also being held at Mason Temple; and

34 WHEREAS, on the night of April 3, Dr. King spoke to about 2,000 people gathered at Mason
35 Temple, telling them the story of the Good Samaritan and applying it to the strikers, and was
36 assassinated the next day at 6:01 P.M. on the balcony outside of Room 306 of the Lorraine
37 Motel; and

38 WHEREAS, on April 6, President Lyndon Johnson ordered United States Labor Department
39 officials to intervene and help end the strike, and on April 8, Coretta Scott King and her four
40 children led a somber and peaceful memorial march from Clayborn Temple to City Hall,
41 with Mrs. King and other national figures speaking in the City Hall Plaza; and

42 WHEREAS, only 12 days after Dr. King's assassination, the city council adopted a
43 memorandum of understanding on Tuesday, April 16, which recognized the union and
44 provided for dues checkoff and raises, and later that day, union leaders read the agreement
45 to the sanitation workers, and union members voted to accept it.

46 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES that
47 the members of this body honor the 50th anniversary of the death of sanitation workers Echol
48 Cole and Robert Walker and celebrate the victorious strike of the Memphis sanitation
49 workers.

50 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Clerk of the House of Representatives is authorized
51 and directed to make appropriate copies of this resolution available for distribution to the
52 public and the press.