

Senate Resolution 877

By: Senators Orrock of the 36th, Wicks of the 34th, James of the 28th, Mangham of the 55th, Jackson of the 41st and others

A RESOLUTION

- 1 Honoring the life and legacy of Tom Coffin; and for other purposes.
- 2 WHEREAS, Tom Coffin was a lifelong advocate for justice, equality, and the dignity of
3 working people whose 82 years of purpose-driven life were marked by what he often
4 described as making "good trouble"; and
- 5 WHEREAS, born on September 1, 1943, in Dearborn, Michigan, and raised in Soap Lake,
6 he developed an early appreciation for literature, the natural world, and the power of ideas
7 to shape communities; and
- 8 WHEREAS, he earned a Bachelor of Arts in literature from Reed College in 1967 and later
9 achieved a Doctor of Philosophy in forestry from the University of Georgia in 1995,
10 reflecting a lifelong commitment to learning and scholarship; and
- 11 WHEREAS, in 1968, he co-founded and became the first editor of Atlanta's cooperatively
12 owned underground newspaper, *The Great Speckled Bird*, affectionately known as "The
13 Bird," which became one of the most influential independent newspapers of its era, reaching
14 a weekly circulation of 30,000 and blending political reporting with cultural and social
15 activism; and

16 WHEREAS, through its coverage of the Vietnam War, the women's liberation and gay
17 liberation movements, labor struggles, and local community issues, The Bird embodied Mr.
18 Coffin's steadfast belief in free expression and grassroots journalism, and he later worked to
19 preserve its legacy through collaboration with the Georgia State University Archives to
20 create a digitized collection and oral history project for future generations; and

21 WHEREAS, from 1976 to 1989, Mr. Coffin worked in Atlanta's construction trades,
22 including as a crane operator with Local 926 of the Operating Engineers, exemplifying his
23 deep respect for organized labor and solidarity with working men and women; and

24 WHEREAS, after earning his doctorate, he served as an adjunct professor of sociology at
25 Georgia State University, where he courageously advocated for the rights of adjunct faculty
26 to organize, and he later served as head field arborist for the City of Atlanta, where his
27 commitment to integrity led him to file and ultimately prevail in a whistleblower action; and

28 WHEREAS, he helped organize the first chapter of the Georgia Arborist Association, the
29 state chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture, and shared his expertise as an avid
30 tree climber and instructor across the nation, reflecting his enduring dedication to
31 environmental stewardship; and

32 WHEREAS, Mr. Coffin's life was defined not only by activism and professional achievement
33 but also by devotion to family, community, and simple joys—including his reputation as an
34 excellent cook, particularly at breakfast—and by his partnership of 58 years with his beloved
35 wife, Stephanie, alongside his children, grandchildren, and extended family.

36 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE that the members of this body
37 honor the life and legacy of Tom Coffin, whose unwavering commitment to human rights,

38 environmental stewardship, independent journalism, and organized labor leaves an enduring
39 imprint on the State of Georgia and beyond.

40 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Secretary of the Senate is authorized and directed
41 to make an appropriate copy of this resolution available for distribution to the family of Tom
42 Coffin.