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STATEMENT OF REPRESENTATIVE JOHN LEWIS (GA) ON THE 100TH BIRTHDAY OF MR. ROBERT L. DAVIS July 25, 2019

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commend the honor and dignity of Mr. Robert L. Davis, a veteran of World War II, who served this country as a landscape architect, Foreign Service officer, and a professor. This weekend, Mr. Davis will reach an incredible milestone when he turn 100 years old on Saturday, July 27, 2019.

Mr. Davis was born in in Southhampton County, Virginia in the city of Franklin, the same county where the Nat Turner Rebellion took place in 1831. He was born during the tragedy of the Red Summer of 1919, a period the great, late historian and my dear friend, John Hope Franklin called “the greatest period of interracial strife this nation has ever witnessed.” During ten months punctuated by 25 white nationalist riots in cities around our country, hundreds of African Americans were killed by mobs of white supremacists.

Mr. Davis was only 10 years old when the Stock Market crashed in 1929, and he endured all of the poverty and struggles of the Great Depression. He was painfully familiar with the challenges of legalized segregation and racial discrimination growing up as a young boy just 80 miles from the capitol of the old confederacy in Richmond, Virginia. As a student at Virginia State University, Mr. Davis studied horticulture. In addition to his studies, he became an avid boxer and even won an amateur welterweight championship, which earned him the nickname “Champ” among his college peers.

On the day that he joined the Omega Psi Phi fraternity in 1942, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, and the Army drafted Mr. Davis to fight on the frontlines in World War II shortly after he completed his undergraduate studies. Stationed at Cherbourg-Octeville, France, he became a decorated veteran due to his engagement in battle on D-Day during the invasions of Normandy as part of the Allied Forces landing at Omaha Beach.

After the war, Mr. Davis returned to his studies and earned a master’s degree from the University of Wisconsin. As a graduate student, he met the former Myrtle Mae Bowers, his late wife of over 30 years. She was a doctoral student who also served in the Red Cross during World War II,