

LOUISIANA CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER JOHNNIE JONES NAMED MARGARET CHASE SMITH AMERICAN DEMOCRACY AWARD RECIPIENT

July 19, 2024

BATON ROUGE, La. — Secretary of State Nancy Landry is pleased to announce that Louisiana native Johnnie Jones, a veteran of the Second World War and key figure of the Civil Rights Movement, has been posthumously named the 2024 Margaret Chase Smith American Democracy Award winner. Jones was named the recipient of this prestigious honor on Friday, July 12 at the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS) Summer Conference in Puerto Rico. NASS members recognize award recipients for individual acts of political courage, uncommon character, and selfless action in the realm of public service.

A native of Laurel Hill, Louisiana, Jones was drafted into the U.S. Army when the United States entered the Second World War and took part in the Normandy Invasion as part of the 494th Port Battalion. He was wounded aboard the SS Francis C. Harrington when it struck a mine and then came under fire from German aircraft. Despite his injuries, Jones continued to fight for the liberation of France, fought in the Battle of the Bulge, and served as an aide to General Dwight D. Eisenhower. He was awarded a Purple Heart for his injuries sustained in combat at a ceremony in 2021 at Louisiana's Old State Capitol.

When Jones returned home from war, he was beaten by a police officer on his way to a medical appointment to care for his injuries. This compelled him to pursue his law degree at Southern University Law Center. After graduating from law school in 1953, Mr. Jones was asked to represent protestors and members of the United Defense League who were participating in the Baton Rouge Bus Boycott. This protest became the blueprint for the Montgomery Bus Boycott. He continued to serve as a civil rights activist as a member of the Louisiana House of Representatives, and after his one term in office, he returned to practicing law until the age of 93. Jones passed away at the age of 102 in 2022.

“I was pleased to nominate Mr. Jones for this prestigious award and am honored that my colleagues have seen fit to name him as this year's award recipient,” Secretary Landry said. “From his service on the beaches of Normandy, to the Baton Rouge Bus Boycott, to his time in the state capitol, Mr. Jones spent his life fighting for what he believed in and represented the very best of Louisiana.”

Previous award recipients include Rosa Parks, the Little Rock Nine, former U.S. Secretary of State Dr. Condoleezza Rice, and former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor.

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