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President, others react to death of Civil Rights activist Amelia Boynton Robinson

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By WSFA 12 News Staff



File photo of Amelia Boynton Robinson traveling to Washington, D.C. to listen to President Barack Obama's State of the Union Address.



Boynton meets with President Obama during the State of the Union Address



(Source: NBC News)

MONTGOMERY, AL (WSFA) - President Barack Obama and others are reacting to the news that Amelia Boynton Robinson, the Civil Rights activist whose accomplishments were portrayed in the recently produced, Oscar-nominated film, "Selma," died Wednesday at the age of 104.

The president offered his thoughts and prayers, issuing this statement:

"Amelia Boynton Robinson was a dedicated and courageous leader in the fight for civil rights. For most of her 104 years, Amelia committed herself to a simple, American principle: that everybody deserves the right to vote. Fifty years ago, she marched in Selma, and the quiet heroism of those marchers helped pave the way for the landmark Voting Rights Act. But for the rest of her life, she kept marching - to make sure the law was upheld, and barriers to the polls torn down. And America is so fortunate she did. To honor the legacy of an American hero like Amelia Boynton requires only that we follow her example - that all of us fight to protect everyone's right to vote. Earlier this year, in Selma, Michelle and I had the honor to walk with Amelia and other foot soldiers of the Civil Rights Movement. She was as strong, as hopeful, and as indomitable of spirit - as quintessentially American - as I'm sure she was that day 50 years ago. And we offer our thoughts, our prayers, and our enduring gratitude to everyone who loved her."

The elderly woman had recently suffered a massive stroke. Her family released a statement confirming her passing:

"After being hospitalized last month following a massive stroke, Dr. Amelia Boynton Robinson's health continued to deteriorate. With deep sadness, we announce that she passed peacefully this morning with family and friends surrounding her at approximately 2:20 a.m. in Noland Hospital of Montgomery in Alabama. Funeral arrangements will be announced later. Thank you. The FamilyThe Family wishes to thank all who have contributed to Dr. Boynton Robinson's medical expenses. There is still a need for financial assistance. Please feel free to make your contributions directly at PNC Bank, 102 East Rosa Parks Avenue, Tuskegee, Alabama 36083, under the "Amelia Boynton Robinson Conservatorship Account."

Boynton was born on August 18, 1911 in Savannah, Georgia. Despite that, she considered Tuskegee her home saying at her 100th birthday celebration "Tuskegee is my heart. Nothing is as dear to me as Tuskegee."

A member of the class of 1927, Robinson visited her alma mater dozens of times in the nearly 90 years after her graduation. Around campus, she was affectionately known as 'Queen Mother.'

"Clearly in her bearing and her words of wisdom that she poured in so many people, including myself, you could easily see and easily recognize that she was a queen, a mother, and all the things that are attributed to those titles," said Tuskegee University President Brian Johnson. "Tuskegee means warrior and indeed, Dr. Robinson was a warrior in both words and works in her quest for justice and equality. The university is deeply, deeply sorrowful at this time but at the same time, we're resonating with celebration with the fact that her legacy will be forever cemented at the university as well as throughout this great nation and world."

In 1964 she became both the first African-American woman and the first female Democratic candidate to run for a seat in Congress from Alabama.

Boynton Robinson played a significant role in 1965's 'Bloody Sunday' and the march from Selma to Montgomery in an effort to secure African-Americans' right to register and vote.

45 years later, a Selma native would follow in Boynton Robinson's footsteps to run for and win that congressional seat. Sewell released a statement saying:

"Today while we mourn the passing of Amelia Boynton Robinson, we must also celebrate the life and legacy of a real American treasure. Mrs. Boynton Robinson personified the essence of an American hero through her courageous and passionate fight for the fundamental right to vote for every citizen in this nation. I will always cherish the time we spent together when she honored me as my special guest for the State of the Union on January 20, 2015. I am grateful for the memories of her greeting President Obama that night and I am so blessed to call her a beloved mentor and friend. Mrs. Amelia Boynton Robinson will not only be remembered for her invaluable contributions as a matriarch of the voting rights movement but she was also the first black woman from the State of Alabama to run for Congress. Without her courageous campaign for the 7th Congressional District, I know that my election to this seat in 2010 would not have been possible. Her sacrifices paved the way for me to walk the halls of Congress and I will carry my love and admiration for her in my heart each and every day. As she reminded us in life, there is still much work to be done for this nation to live up to its ideals of equality and justice for all. Let us be inspired by the extraordinary life of Mrs. Amelia Boynton Robinson to keep striving and working towards a more perfect union. May we honor her by continuing her life's work."

In his State of the Union address earlier in 2015, President Obama spoke about the 50th anniversary of the Selma to Montgomery March and the right to vote. Boynton's attendance at the State of the Union address came after a special invitation Rep. Terri Sewell, a fellow African-American female, who secured the seat for which Boynton once fought. Sewell represents the people of Selma and Alabama's District 7 in Congress.

Governor Robert Bentley also praised Boynton Robinson calling her a "pioneer". Bentley issued a statement saying:

"I am saddened to hear about the death of Amelia Boynton Robinson. She was a pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement who began working to secure voting rights for African Americans in Selma in the 1930s. Her passion for equality and her spirit to preserve human rights were immense and unwavering. Amelia was great Alabamian. She was a true pioneer and her life should serve as an example to future generations of leaders."

The head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), Charles Steele, Jr., also reacted:

"It is with deep sadness and humility that I have learned of the death of human rights and voting rights activist Ms. Amelia Boynton-Robinson, a true and dedicated servant for civil rights - especially voting rights - for all of God's children. SCLC is blessed to have witnessed her pioneering efforts toward the 1965 Selma to Montgomery march, led by SCLC Founding President Martin Luther King, Jr., which ultimately led to blacks obtaining the right to vote following President Johnson's signature on the historic legislation 50 years ago on Aug. 6, 1965. Furthermore, Ms. Boynton-Robinson was the straw that stirred the drink after incorporating the mixture, with her tenacity, courage and strength, that helped make Selma the historic locale it is today, as well as brought full circle for Americans to participate in the democratic process by way of the ballot box. She was to Selma what Mrs. Rosa Parks was to Montgomery, Ala. Therefore, I say to her, 'extraordinary job well done, our loyal and faithful sister!' May our 'shero' rest peacefully as she journeys to her eternal home. Our love and sincerest condolences go out to the Boynton family at this difficult time. May we forever remember and embrace Amelia Boynton-Robinson's legacy as we now work to sustain African-Americans' right to equal access to the ballot box."

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