

By: Senator(s) Horhn, Farris, Thames,
Johnson (19th), Tollison, Ross, Furniss,
Williamson, Smith, Dearing, Nunnelee, Little,
Hamilton

To: Rules

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 55

1 A RESOLUTION COMMENDING THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF WILLIE W.
2 MORRIS OF YAZOO CITY, MISSISSIPPI.

3 WHEREAS, William Weaks Morris was born in 1934 in Jackson,
4 Mississippi, but when he was six months old his parents moved to
5 Yazoo City, a small town located, as he writes in *North Toward*
6 *Home*, "on the edge of the Delta, straddling that memorable divide
7 where the hills end and the flat land begins"; and

8 WHEREAS, Willie Morris died August 2, 1999, having nearly
9 finished his latest work, a project with his son about his home
10 state's rich history and future; and

11 WHEREAS, his family members were all story tellers, and he
12 grew up in the almost conscious tradition of recounting tales and
13 handing them down from one generation to the next; and

14 WHEREAS, after he graduated from high school in 1952 as
15 Valedictorian of his class, he left the familiar Mississippi Delta
16 for the University of Texas in Austin, where he became Editor of
17 the student newspaper, *the Daily Texan*, in his senior year. A
18 member of Phi Beta Kappa when he graduated in 1956, Morris
19 continued his education as a Rhodes Scholar, studying history at
20 Oxford University. When he returned to the United States, he
21 edited the crusading *Texas Observer*, a liberal weekly newspaper,
22 from 1960 to 1962; and

23 WHEREAS, in 1963 Morris became Associate Editor of *Harper's*
24 magazine and in 1967 he was named editor-in-chief, shortly before
25 the publication of *North Toward Home*, which not only was a best
26 seller but also received the prestigious Houghton Mifflin Literary

27 Fellowship Award for nonfiction as well as several other honors;
28 and

29 WHEREAS, in 1980 Morris returned to his native state as
30 writer-in-residence at the University of Mississippi in Oxford and
31 wrote *The Courting of Marcus Dupree* (1983); and

32 WHEREAS, in 1990 Morris married long-time friend JoAnne
33 Prichard, an astute, imaginative Editor at the *University Press of*
34 *Mississippi* who was responsible for *Homecomings*, his award-winning
35 essay collection. After their marriage, they moved to Jackson,
36 Mississippi, where he began poring over *Harper's* papers and
37 writing old comrades for reminiscences in preparation for a second
38 autobiographical volume, *New York Days* (1993); and

39 WHEREAS, Willie's impressive publications are as follows:
40 (Nonfiction) *North Toward Home* (1967); *Yazoo: Integration in a*
41 *Deep-Southern Town* (1971); *A Southern Album: Recollections of*
42 *Some People and Places and Times Gone By* (1975); *James Jones: A*
43 *Friendship* (1978); *The Courting of Marcus Dupree* (1983);
44 *Faulkner's Mississippi* (1990); *New York Days* (1993); *My Dog Skip*
45 (1995); and *The Ghosts of Medgar Evers: A Tale of Race, Murder,*
46 *Mississippi and Hollywood* (1998); (Essay Collections) *The South*
47 *Today: 100 Years After Appomattox* (1965) and *Terrains of the*
48 *Heart*; and

49 WHEREAS, to carry on the work Willie began, a cadre of
50 friends and supporters has been established called the "Friends of
51 Willie Morris," who are hosting an annual event called
52 "Remembering Willie: A Yazoo Celebration" which will bring
53 together many of Willie Morris' boyhood friends, his literary
54 colleagues and his admirers, as well as others touched by his
55 generous heart and evocative prose; and

56 WHEREAS, during the three decades since the *London Sunday*
57 *Times* praised his memoir *North Toward Home* the "finest evocation
58 of an American boyhood since Mark Twain, "Willie Morris wrote more
59 than a dozen other books and attained national prominence in his

60 career as a journalist, nonfiction writer, novelist, editor and
61 essayist, all placing the South into the larger American
62 perspective, and his recognition brings honor to his home
63 community and to the State of Mississippi:

64 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF
65 MISSISSIPPI, That we do hereby commend the life and legacy of
66 William (Willie) Weaks Morris of Yazoo City, Mississippi, one of
67 Mississippi's most famous authors, and recognize his contribution
68 to the literacy heritage of our state.

69 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That a copy of this resolution be
70 presented to the family of Willie Morris, the Mayor of Yazoo City
71 and be made available to the Capitol Press Corps.