SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 55

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

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS, in 1963 Morris became Associate Editor of Harper's magazine and in 1967 he was named editor-in-chief, shortly before the publication of *North Toward Home*, which not only was a best seller but also received the prestigious Houghton Mifflin Literary...
Fellowship Award for nonfiction as well as several other honors; and

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

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

WHEREAS, Willie's impressive publications are as follows:

(Nonfiction) *North Toward Home* (1967); *Yazoo: Integration in a Deep-Southern Town* (1971); *A Southern Album: Recollections of Some People and Places and Times Gone By* (1975); *James Jones: A Friendship* (1978); *The Courting of Marcus Dupree* (1983);

*Faulkner's Mississippi* (1990); *New York Days* (1993); *My Dog Skip* (1995); and *The Ghosts of Medgar Evers: A Tale of Race, Murder, Mississippi and Hollywood* (1998); (Essay Collections) *The South Today: 100 Years After Appomattox* (1965) and *Terrains of the Heart*; and

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

WHEREAS, during the three decades since the *London Sunday Times* praised his memoir *North Toward Homes* the "finest evocation of an American boyhood since Mark Twain," *Willie Morris wrote more than a dozen other books and attained national prominence in his*
career as a journalist, nonfiction writer, novelist, editor and 
essayist, all placing the South into the larger American 
perspective, and his recognition brings honor to his home 
community and to the State of Mississippi:

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

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