SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 584

A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION COMMENDING THE LIFE AND CAREER OF CHOCTAW COUNTY NATIVE JAMES BLACKWOOD, FOUNDING MEMBER OF THE BLACKWOOD BROTHERS GOSPEL QUARTET, AND EXPRESSING THE SYMPATHY OF THE LEGISLATURE

WHEREAS, James Blackwood, the sharecroppers' son whose resonant voice took him from the country churches and revival tents of red-dirt Mississippi to the summits of gospel music, died on February 3rd in Memphis, Tennessee, at 82 years of age; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Blackwood, the last surviving founding member of the famed Blackwood Brothers Gospel Quartet, was sometimes called the Frank Sinatra of gospel music, an allusion to his 200 albums, 9 Grammys and personal appearances from the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., to the First Baptist Church in Moscow; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Blackwood was particularly fond of Elvis Presley, whom he first got to know at the First Assembly of God Church in Memphis, where their families belonged; like Presley, he absorbed the music of both black and white churches. He befriended Presley when he was still an unknown truck driver, buying him a ticket to see the Blackwood Brothers Quartet at one of their monthly sold-out concerts at the Ellis Auditorium in Memphis; and

WHEREAS, James Webre Blackwood was born in Choctaw County, Mississippi, where his parents farmed land owned by someone else and paid the landlord with much of the crop; and

WHEREAS, in 1934, the brothers (James, Doyle, Roy and Roy's son, R.W.) formed their own group, the Blackwood Brothers Quartet. The quartet performed at all-day church songfests, camp meetings...
and schools, subsisting on "free-will offerings" during the Depression; and

WHEREAS, in 1940, V.O. Stamps, President of the Stamps-Baxter Music Company and a major figure in gospel music, asked them to move to Shenandoah, Iowa, to broadcast on a station there. When World War II started, the group broke up, and James worked as a welder at a factory in California; and

WHEREAS, after the war, the Blackwoods resumed their career in Iowa. They moved to Memphis in 1950, and sang on the WMPS High Noon Roundup. Their audience included Elvis Presley and Johnny Cash; and

WHEREAS, their big break came in 1954, when they sang "Have you Talked to the Man Upstairs?" on "Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts" on CBS. They won First Place and landed a contract with R.C.A., but most important, put their brand of sacred music before a national audience for the first time. They became the first gospel group to sell a million records; and

WHEREAS, in 1970, James Blackwood retired because of health problems and was replaced by his son, Jimmy. But he continued singing, sometimes with the old group, at times with others. In 1999, he was still making 75 appearances a year; and

WHEREAS, the Gospel Music Association named him "Top Male Vocalist" seven times. He was nominated for Grammys in 31 different years and won 9 times; and

WHEREAS, the love of Mr. Blackwood's life was his wife, Miriam Le. They remained married for 62 years. He is survived by his wife, two sons, Billy of Hendersonville, Tennessee, and Jimmy, of Memphis, Tennessee, six grandchildren and five great-grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, it is with great pride that we recognize the landmark gospel music accomplishments of this Mississippi native, who has brought honor to his state:
NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING THEREIN, That we do hereby commend the life and gospel music career of Choctaw County native James Blackwood, founding member of the Blackwood Brothers Gospel Quartet, and express to his surviving family the sympathy of the Legislature.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That this resolution be forwarded to Mr. Blackwood's surviving family, and be made available to the Capitol Press Corps.