

By: Senator(s) Williamson, Dawkins,
Hamilton, Carmichael, White (5th), Dearing,
Lee, Little, Johnson (19th), Farris

To: Rules

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 584

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

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

9 WHEREAS, Mr. Blackwood, the last surviving founding member of
10 the famed Blackwood Brothers Gospel Quartet, was sometimes called
11 the Frank Sinatra of gospel music, an allusion to his 200 albums,
12 9 Grammys and personal appearances from the Kennedy Center in
13 Washington, D.C., to the First Baptist Church in Moscow; and

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

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

25 WHEREAS, in 1934, the brothers (James, Doyle, Roy and Roy's
26 son, R.W.) formed their own group, the Blackwood Brothers Quartet.
27 The quartet performed at all-day church songfests, camp meetings



28 and schools, subsisting on "free-will offerings" during the
29 Depression; and

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

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

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

45 WHEREAS, in 1970, James Blackwood retired because of health
46 problems and was replaced by his son, Jimmy. But he continued
47 singing, sometimes with the old group, at times with others. In
48 1999, he was still making 75 appearances a year; and

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

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

57 WHEREAS, it is with great pride that we recognize the
58 landmark gospel music accomplishments of this Mississippi native,
59 who has brought honor to his state:



60 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF
61 MISSISSIPPI, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING THEREIN, That
62 we do hereby commend the life and gospel music career of Choctaw
63 County native James Blackwood, founding member of the Blackwood
64 Brothers Gospel Quartet, and express to his surviving family the
65 sympathy of the Legislature.

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

