

By: Senator(s) Harden, Albritton, Browning,
Bryan, Burton, Butler, Carmichael, Clarke,
Davis, Dawkins, Dearing, Doxey, Frazier,
Gollott, Gordon, Horhn, Hyde-Smith, Jackson
(11th), King, Lee (35th), Little, Mettetal,
Moffatt, Morgan, Nunnelee, Robertson, Ross,
Simmons, Tollison, Walls, White, Wilemon,
Williamson, Jackson (32nd)

To: Rules

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 542

1 A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION COMMENDING THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF
2 FORMER STATE SENATOR HENRY J. KIRKSEY OF JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI, AND
3 EXPRESSING THE SYMPATHY OF THE LEGISLATURE.

4 WHEREAS, former State Senator Henry J. Kirksey, whose legal
5 challenges are credited for Mississippi having the most black
6 elected officials in the country, died on December 9, 2005, in
7 Jackson, Mississippi. He was 90 years old; and

8 WHEREAS, a Tupelo native, Senator Kirksey was one of the
9 first African-Americans elected to the Mississippi State Senate
10 after Reconstruction and was a civil rights activist for most of
11 his life; and

12 WHEREAS, "Kirksey," as he was affectionately called by many
13 in the Civil Rights Movement, was born May 9, 1915, on the family
14 farm outside Tupelo in Lee County, Mississippi. The Kirksey
15 family believed in education, and as a young boy, Kirksey, like
16 every black student during those times, walked five miles to and
17 from school each day. The segregated schools and those early
18 experiences marked him for life, and he made a life-long
19 commitment to fight for equal educational opportunities, justice
20 and fairness for everyone; and

21 WHEREAS, he graduated from high school in St. Louis and
22 attended North Carolina Central University in Durham, North
23 Carolina, where he played football and majored in economics. He
24 joined the United States Army during World War II, and while
25 serving he developed his skills in map making and demographics.
26 His commitment brought Kirksey back to Mississippi in 1962 to join
27 the Civil Rights Movement, where he fought alongside other giants

28 of the movement including Medgar Evers, Charles Evers, Rev. Dr.
29 Martin Luther King, Fannie Lou Hamer, Aaron Henry and others; and

30 WHEREAS, Senator Kirksey spent the majority of his adult life
31 in and around Jackson. Kirksey filed several lawsuits against the
32 City of Jackson and the state, some of which brought about change.
33 In 1965, he filed suit against the Hinds County Board of
34 Supervisors and the State of Mississippi, challenging countywide
35 election of State Representatives and Senators. The U.S. Supreme
36 Court's ruling was perhaps Kirksey's most significant
37 accomplishment, which eventually led to redistricting for local,
38 state and federal elected offices. That suit resulted in the
39 adoption of single-member legislative districts in 1979. His
40 service as a plaintiff, expert witness and community organizer
41 allowed African-Americans to capture hundreds of government seats
42 nationwide, and in Mississippi, led to the election of almost 600
43 African-Americans to public office. Kirksey was also one of the
44 individuals who sued to make public the records of the state's
45 Sovereignty Commission, which were opened in 1998; and

46 WHEREAS, Senator Kirksey was elected to Senate District No.
47 28 in 1979 and served two terms from 1980-1987. While in the
48 Senate, he was an outspoken and fiery advocate of issues to the
49 people. He was particularly interested in criticizing violations
50 of separation of governmental functions as between the legislative
51 and executive branches of Mississippi government (an issue which
52 was solved by the Mississippi Supreme Court in 1984 in the
53 landmark case Allain v. Alexander, et al). Senator Kirksey would
54 abstain on every vote appropriating funds to an agency whose
55 governing board included legislators instead of executive branch
56 officials; and

57 WHEREAS, Senator Kirksey used the number crunching skills he
58 learned as an economist and the mapmaking skills of a demographer
59 and cartographer he learned while serving in the Army to put
60 blacks in office in Mississippi and throughout the nation; and

61 WHEREAS, his ashes were spread over the cemetery where his
62 parents were laid to rest. In addition to his daughter, Karin
63 Kirksey Zander of Raleigh, North Carolina, he also is survived by
64 his son, Henry Kirksey, Jr., of Los Angeles and three
65 grand-daughters; and

66 WHEREAS, Kirksey was a visionary and avid sports fan who used
67 sports metaphors to explain his vision of a better Mississippi.
68 He fought for the "playing fields to be leveled and for every one
69 to start at the same starting line"; and

70 WHEREAS, all black elected officials in Mississippi owe their
71 election more to Henry Kirksey than anyone else, and it is with
72 sadness and pride that we note the passing of this Mississippian
73 who helped us do what was in the interest of all its citizens:

74 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF
75 MISSISSIPPI, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING THEREIN, That
76 we do hereby commend the life and legacy of former State Senator
77 and noted black political leader Henry J. Kirksey of Jackson,
78 Mississippi, and express to his surviving family the sympathy of
79 the Legislature on his passing.

80 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this resolution be presented to
81 his family at the memorial in Senator Kirksey's honor and be made
82 available to the Capitol Press Corps.