MISSISSIPPI LEGISLATURE REGULAR SESSION 2006

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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 legacy of former State Senator and noted black political leader Henry J. Kirksey of Jackson, Mississippi, and express to his surviving family the sympathy of the Legislature on his passing.

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