

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 548

By Ford

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Speaker Pro Tempore Emeritus Lois M. DeBerry.

WHEREAS, the members of this body were greatly saddened by the passing of our trusted and valued colleague, Speaker Pro Tempore Emeritus Lois M. DeBerry of Memphis; and

WHEREAS, the longest serving member of the Tennessee House of Representatives with 41 years (88th through 108th General Assemblies), Speaker DeBerry was a tireless advocate for her native Memphis, public education, children and families, and this state's neediest citizens throughout her long and distinguished career in representing the 91st House District; and

WHEREAS, noted for her outspokenness and her consummate advocacy of legislation, Speaker DeBerry was truly an icon of Tennessee politics, and hers was a brilliant career of many firsts; and

WHEREAS, Lois DeBerry was the first African American woman elected to the Tennessee House of Representatives from the City of Memphis and the first female chair of the Shelby County Delegation; and

WHEREAS, in 1987, she became the first woman elected Speaker Pro Tempore in Tennessee and her twenty-four years of exemplary service (95th through 106th General Assemblies) in that leadership post is unmatched in our state's rich history; she was also the first female African American Speaker Pro Tempore in the nation; and

WHEREAS, Lois DeBerry was elected Speaker Pro Tempore Emeritus for the 107th and 108th General Assemblies by her colleagues in recognition of her indelible legacy of public service; and

WHEREAS, having formerly served as House Democratic Floor Leader, she was House Democratic Deputy Leader at the time of her passing and a valuable member of the House Finance, Ways and Means Committee and the House Education Committee; and

WHEREAS, Speaker DeBerry was one of Tennessee's most effective political leaders and served as a bridge builder between the Black Caucus and the General Assembly's leadership and governors, both past and present; and

WHEREAS, she is credited with bringing Tennessee's prison system out from under federal oversight and into the 21st century; the Lois DeBerry Center in Nashville, which revolutionized the state's handling of prisoners, is named in her honor; and

WHEREAS, a respected leader and living legend among her fellow African American legislators, Speaker DeBerry founded and served as chairperson of the Annual Retreat of the Tennessee Black Caucus of State Legislators and was President Emeritus of the National Black Caucus of State Legislators; and

WHEREAS, on the national level, she is perhaps best remembered for her stirring speech seconding the nomination of presidential candidate Al Gore at the Democratic National Convention in 2000; and

WHEREAS, she also rendered astute and dedicated service as Chair of the State Legislative Leaders Foundation, Chair and member of Women in Government Foundation, Incorporated, board member and executive committee member of the Legislative Advisory Council, member of the Southern Regional Education Board, member of NOBEL - Women, National Organization of Black Elected Legislators, and founder and chair of NOBEL - Women's Annual Retreat; and

WHEREAS, Lois DeBerry was a graduate of LeMoyne College (now LeMoyne-Owen College) in Memphis and was active both locally and nationally as a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, serving as a social action team member for Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, this peerless public servant was also a member of the Memphis chapter of LINKS, Inc.; NAACP; and P.U.S.H.; and

WHEREAS, during the course of her remarkable career as a legislator and public servant, Lois DeBerry amassed a legion of accolades and honors too numerous to mention, but which include: the William M. Bulger Excellence in State Legislative Leadership Award, NBCSL/Pfizer Humanitarian Award, Women's Foundation Legends Award, Martin Luther King Drum Major Award, Arthur Holmon Lifetime Achievement Award, *Kansas City Globe's* 100 Most Influential African Americans, Memphis City Schools Alumni Hall of Fame, Dr. Henry Logan Starks Distinguished Service Award, and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority's Mary Church Terrell Award; and

WHEREAS, a humble Christian servant, Speaker DeBerry was dedicated to her church, Greater Abyssinia Missionary Baptist Church in Memphis; and

WHEREAS, she is survived by her husband, Charles Traughber, son, Michael Boyer, and three grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, although Speaker DeBerry had struggled with her health during the past five years, she refused to quit her legislative duties or even slow her pace; to the end, she was an active legislator and stalwart proponent of what was right for all Tennesseans; and

WHEREAS, Lois DeBerry strongly believed that the underprivileged should not go unrepresented, and she devoted her life to achieving that purpose; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that even as we mourn her passing, we celebrate the bountiful and righteous life of Representative Lois DeBerry, one of the finest legislators this state has ever produced and a lady of many firsts, as a legislator, public servant, and human being.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we express our sympathy and extend our condolences to Speaker DeBerry's family, friends, and colleagues.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.