

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 641

By McNally

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Senator Thelma Harper of Nashville.

WHEREAS, we were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of Senator Thelma Harper, our most valued and trusted colleague, who devoted her life to serving the most vulnerable members of her community; and

WHEREAS, the first African-American female elected to the Tennessee Senate and the longest-tenured female Senator in Tennessee history, Senator Thelma Harper served the citizens of the 19th Senate District and this legislative body with honor and distinction as a member of the 97th through 110th General Assemblies; and

WHEREAS, throughout her long and distinguished legislative career, Senator Harper represented her constituents with hope, passion, respect, and dignity; and

WHEREAS, Senator Thelma Harper provided a strong, unwavering voice in support of women, our most vulnerable children, and the elderly, sponsoring and passing legislation to address a wide range of societal problems; and

WHEREAS, Senator Harper played an integral role in the economic development of the 19th Senate District, helping win the adoption of numerous State budget amendments to benefit the citizens of her district through job training programs, workforce development efforts, and capital projects; and

WHEREAS, Senator Harper worked closely with five sitting mayors of Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County to improve downtown Nashville, which was in her district; and

WHEREAS, she was a participant in many important moments in Nashville history, including the development of the Music City Center, the construction of the main branch of the

Nashville Public Library, and the successful effort to bring the Tennessee Titans to Nashville;
and

WHEREAS, she was also instrumental in securing State funds for her alma mater,
Tennessee State University, and Meharry Medical College; and

WHEREAS, Thelma Harper was the first African-American female chair of a standing
committee of the Tennessee General Assembly, serving as the chair of the Senate Government
Operations Committee during the 102nd through 105th General Assemblies; and

WHEREAS, the first African-American woman to preside over the Senate, Senator
Thelma Harper was the first Senator to serve as chair of the Tennessee Black Caucus of State
Legislators; and

WHEREAS, Senator Harper inspired a whole new generation of public servants as a role
model, mentor, and mother figure in Nashville's close-knit political community; she has been
affectionately described as a "beacon for African-American women" and "Nashville's Mother in
Politics"; and

WHEREAS, in addition to her trailblazing political career, Senator Harper possessed a
refined sense of sartorial style, and she was easily recognizable by her large signature hats;
those who were close to her know that her heart was even bigger; and

WHEREAS, the first recipient of the Woman of Achievement Award, Senator Harper was
also included on the prestigious Wall of Fame at Tennessee State University and celebrated at
numerous events; and

WHEREAS, Thelma Harper began her groundbreaking political career in 1981, when
she was elected Davidson County Executive Committee Woman for the Tennessee Democratic
Party; and

WHEREAS, she later served several years as the Tennessee Democratic Caucus chair
and as a State delegate to the Democratic National Convention from 1980 to 2008; in 2000,

Senator Harper introduced presidential candidate Al Gore at the Democratic National Convention; and

WHEREAS, in 1983, Thelma Harper sought and won election to the Metropolitan Nashville Council, representing the 2nd District; and

WHEREAS, Senator Harper's eight-year tenure on the Metropolitan Nashville Council saw her lead the successful fight to close the Bordeaux Landfill via a number of protests and blockades, during which time she was arrested along with her fellow community activists; the facility was eventually closed, and her legislation to set fair and equitable standards for locating landfills was enacted; and

WHEREAS, a hopeful and compassionate person, she hosted a popular Easter egg hunt for Nashville's children, an event that her family has pledged to continue; and

WHEREAS, Senator Thelma Harper is survived by her daughter and son-in-law, Linda and Bobby; and

WHEREAS, she was preceded in death by her husband, Paul Harper, and her son, Dylan W. Harper; and

WHEREAS, Senator Thelma Harper spoke eloquently for those without a voice in our society, and we should pause to reflect upon her indelible legacy as a legislator, public servant, and human being; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we honor the memory of Senator Thelma Harper, reflecting fondly upon her groundbreaking tenure in the Senate and her lifetime of public service, and extend our sympathy and condolences to her family and many friends.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy and upon proper request made to

the appropriate clerk, the language appearing immediately following the State seal appear without House or Senate designation.