

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 777

By McNally

A RESOLUTION to honor and commend Senator Thelma Harper for her service to the people of Tennessee as a member of the Senate.

WHEREAS, it is most appropriate that the members of this body should honor those fellow legislators who performed their duties with the utmost integrity and whose efforts during their time in office were dedicated to providing thoughtful and exemplary service to their district and to this great State; and

WHEREAS, the first African-American female elected to the Tennessee State Senate and the longest-serving female State Senator in Tennessee history, Senator Thelma Harper of Nashville has served the citizens of the 19th Senate District and this legislative body with honor and distinction as a member of the 97th, 98th, 99th, 100th, 101st, 102nd, 103rd, 104th, 105th, 106th, 107th, 108th, 109th, and 110th General Assemblies; and

WHEREAS, born in Williamson County, Thelma Harper received her Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration/Accounting from Tennessee State University. She attended Haynes High School and graduated from Cameron High School; and

WHEREAS, in 1977, Thelma Harper began her extraordinary public service career when she was selected to serve as Grand Jury Foreman for Davidson County's 5th Circuit Court and subsequently sought election to the Metropolitan Nashville/Davidson County Council to represent the 2nd District in 1983; and

WHEREAS, Senator Harper's eight-year tenure on the Metropolitan Council saw her lead the successful fight to close the Bordeaux Landfill via a number of protests and blockades of dump trucks, during which she was arrested along with her fellow community activists, before the facility was closed and legislation she sponsored was enacted to set fair and equitable standards relative to landfill locations; and

WHEREAS, since her election to the State Senate in November 1990 and throughout her extensive career, Senator Harper has always represented her constituents in Davidson County with passion, respect, and dignity, working diligently at her elected duties at the State Capitol and in her district to improve the quality of life for all Tennesseans; and

WHEREAS, Senator Thelma Harper has provided a strong, unwavering voice for women, our most vulnerable children, and the elderly. She has passed legislation on a range of causes, including the establishment of a fee waiver to provide students from low-income homes with school supplies and lunches; mandatory insurance coverage of breast reconstruction symmetry for breast cancer survivors; increased legal protections to stop financial exploitation of the elderly by their caretakers; and the safe haven law to save abandoned babies; and

WHEREAS, the sponsor of the legislation that renamed a portion of U.S. Highway 41 in honor of civil rights legend Rosa Parks, Senator Harper has played an integral role in the economic development of the 19th Senate District, helping win passage of numerous amendments to state budgets to benefit the citizens of her district through job training programs, workforce development efforts, and capital projects like the Nashville Music City Center, for which project she worked to amend Tennessee's usury law to allow Nashville to sell the bonds to build the facility; and

WHEREAS, the 19th District includes downtown Nashville, and Senator Harper worked closely with five sitting Mayors of Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County and four Governors of Tennessee. She was instrumental in a number of historic moments in Nashville history, including the development of the Music City Center, the construction of the Main Nashville Public Library, and the effort to bring the Tennessee Titans National League Football team to Nashville. She was also instrumental in securing state funds for Tennessee State University and Meharry Medical College; and

WHEREAS, as an active and dynamic participant in the legislative process, Senator Harper has rendered sterling service as a member of the Senate Government Operations Committee, the Senate State and Local Government Committee, the Senate General Welfare, Health, and Human Resources Committee, the Senate Judiciary Committee, the Senate

Transportation and Safety Committee, the Senate Finance, Ways and Means Committee, and the Senate Ethics Committee; and

WHEREAS, Senator Harper has also been a member of the Joint Government Operations Education, Health and General Welfare Subcommittee, the Joint Government Operations Commerce, Labor, Transportation, and Agriculture Subcommittee, the Unsolved Civil Rights Crimes Special Joint Committee, the Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, the Select Committee on Children and Youth, the Corrections Oversight Committee, and the Joint Pensions and Insurance Committee; and

WHEREAS, appointed by Lieutenant Governor John Wilder, Senator Thelma Harper was the first African-American female to serve as the chair of a standing committee of the Tennessee General Assembly when she was named chair of the Senate Government Operations Committee; she held that position during the 102nd, 103rd, 104th, and 105th General Assemblies, and she also served as vice chair of the Senate State and Local Government Committee during the 97th and 101st General Assemblies; and

WHEREAS, the first African-American woman to preside over the Senate, Senator Thelma Harper is a member of the Board of Directors of Women in Government Leadership and the first Senator to serve as chair of the Tennessee Black Caucus of State Legislators; and

WHEREAS, a member of the Senate Democratic Caucus, Senator Thelma Harper is a proud member of the Democratic Party and served as a delegate to the Democratic National Conventions of 1980, 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2012; and

WHEREAS, during her extensive career, Senator Thelma Harper has also served as chair of the Tennessee Commemorative Women's Suffrage Commission, vice chair of the Tennessee Healthcare Commission, member of the Tennessee Economic Council on Women, commissioner of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, and co-chair of Commemorating Metro Nashville Government's 50th Anniversary; and

WHEREAS, actively working for the children of her community, Senator Thelma Harper has sponsored summer science camps for inner city children, established model after-school and summer programs for at-risk adolescent youth, mentored girls at the Woodland Hills Youth

Development Center, sponsored numerous youth sport teams, and founded and hosted the annual "Kids Are Special Too" Community Easter Egg Hunt since 1983; and

WHEREAS, no stranger to awards and accolades, Senator Harper was honored with the 2018 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Metropolitan Minority Caucus; the 2017 NOBEL Women's President Award; the 2017 NOBEL Women's Legacy Award; the 2013 Living Legend Award from the Greater Nashville Alliance of Black School Educators (GNABSE); the 2013 Legacy of Service Award from the Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement; the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's Clubs Business Award; the Jaycees' Woman of the Year Award; the 2010 Davis-Galloway Empowerment Award; the 2009 Public Official of the Year award from the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), Tennessee Chapter; the 2008 Leadership Award from the YMCA of Middle Tennessee and Northwest YMCA; the 2007 "E" Award from the Tennessee Economic Council on Women; the Harriet Tubman Award from Youth About Business; the Political Legislature Award from the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists; the Frances Williams Preston Award for her work on breast cancer legislation and awareness; the 2003 Supporter Award from the Southern Heritage Classic; the 2003 Outstanding Contribution and Distinguished Service Award from Pearl-Cohn Comprehensive Business Magnet High School; the 2003 Appreciation Award for her support and donations to the I Have a Future Program; the 2002 Outstanding Contribution in Government Service Award from Gamma Beta Chapter of ETA PHI BETA Sorority, Inc.; the 1999 Distinguished Service Award; the 1997 Legislative Award from the County Officials Association of Tennessee; the 1995 Women Making a Difference Award from the A. Philip Randolph Institute (APRI), Nashville Chapter; and the 1992 Outstanding Leadership and Service Appreciation Award at the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Business, Industry, Labor and Government Awards; and

WHEREAS, the first recipient of the Woman of Achievement Award for outstanding community involvement at the Women's Leadership Conference hosted by the National Association of Women in Education and Middle Tennessee State University, Senator Harper has been included on the prestigious Wall of Fame at Tennessee State University and celebrated at numerous illustrious events, including the 2017 Vanderbilt Athletics Civil Rights

Equality Weekend, the 2015 Women's History Celebration at the University of Tennessee Space Institute, the 2008 Davidson County Democratic Women's Day Celebration, and the 2001 Women's Equality Day; and

WHEREAS, she has been honored by a variety of civic, community, and charitable organizations, including Women in Numbers (WIN) in 2012 and 2017; the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Association of Tennessee Alphas in 2017; the Women's Political Collaborative in 2015; the Social Work Program of Tennessee State University in 2012; the National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Metropolitan Nashville Chapter; the Nashville Coalition of 100 Black Women Foundation, Inc.; and the Council of the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County; and

WHEREAS, listed in *Who's Who in Politics and Women in Government*, Senator Thelma Harper has been included in such publications as *Black Firsts: 4,000 Ground-Breaking and Pioneering Historical Events* by Jessie Carney Smith; the *Style Blueprint* article "Female Tennessee Trailblazers: Women Who've Paved the Way" by Alex Hendrickson; *Tennessee Government and Politics: Democracy in the Volunteer State* by John R. Vile and Mark E. Byrnes; *Notable Black American Women: Book Two* by Jessie Carney Smith; and the *Nashville* magazine article "Nashville's Outrageous Women"; and

WHEREAS, an individual who truly appreciates the responsibilities, as well as the privileges, of leadership and citizenship, she has donated her time and energies as a member of the Board of Directors of the Nashville Symphony, the Third National Bank Economic Development Advisory Council, the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame Board of Directors, the Nashville Downtown Partnership Board, the Renewal House Advisory Board, the YWCA Advisory Committee, the Board of Directors of the Tennessee Children's Home; the Board of Managers of Northwest YMCA, and the SunTrust Bank Economic Development Advisory Council; and

WHEREAS, a Golden Life member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Incorporated, she is a member of the NAACP, Links, Inc., the Nashville Women's Political Caucus, the Urban League of Middle Tennessee, and Achievement Matters; a former board member of the National Hook-

Up of Black Women; and a former president of the National Hook-Up of Black Women,
Nashville Chapter; and

WHEREAS, Senator Harper evinces her faith as a longtime member of Schrader Lane
Church of Christ; and

WHEREAS, her many civic and professional accomplishments aside, Thelma Harper is
most appreciative of the love and support she shares with her husband of sixty years, Paul W.
Harper, and their two children; and

WHEREAS, Senator Thelma Harper is wholly committed to the noble precepts of public
service that have earned Tennessee recognition as the Volunteer State, and she should be
specially recognized for her exemplary tenure in this body; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED TENTH GENERAL
ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
CONCURRING, that we hereby honor Senator Thelma Harper for her meritorious service to
Tennessee as a member of the Senate, commend her for her countless contributions and many
good works in service of the citizens of the 19th Senate District, and extend to her our best
wishes for much continued success and happiness.

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