

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

SENATE RESOLUTION

No. 98

Session of
2011

INTRODUCED BY BREWSTER, APRIL 27, 2011

INTRODUCED AND ADOPTED, APRIL 27, 2011

A RESOLUTION

1 Recognizing April 29, 2011, as the 68th anniversary of the
2 torpedoing of the SS *McKeesport*.

3 WHEREAS, April 29, 2011, marks the 68th anniversary of the
4 torpedoing of the SS *McKeesport*, an action which launched one of
5 the most violent North Atlantic battles of World War II; and

6 WHEREAS, The SS *McKeesport* was officially launched on March
7 9, 1919, at the shipyards of the Federal Shipbuilding and
8 Drydock Company at Kearney Point, New Jersey; and

9 WHEREAS, Miss Eleanor Roberts Cornelius, daughter of National
10 Tube Works General Manager William A. Cornelius, was the sponsor
11 for the SS *McKeesport* and christened the ship to signify its
12 first launch; and

13 WHEREAS, A freight vessel, the SS *McKeesport* was operated by
14 the American Hampton Roads Line through the 1920s and 1930s, and
15 was one of many freighters pressed into government service
16 during World War II as part of the United States merchant
17 marine; and

18 WHEREAS, The SS *McKeesport*'s finest hour came in 1940 when,

1 as the first so-called mercy ship sent to Europe by the Red
2 Cross and the American Friends Service Committee, it delivered
3 \$1 million in emergency food and supplies to Marseilles, France,
4 to aid refugees who had fled the advancing German army; and

5 WHEREAS, Relief workers reported that the arrival of the SS
6 *McKeesport* had prevented starvation for an estimated one million
7 men, women and children in refugee camps; and

8 WHEREAS, In April 1943, the SS *McKeesport* was one of 43 ships
9 in convoy ONS-5, westbound from Liverpool to New York and
10 carrying 2,000 tons of sand ballast when the convoy encountered
11 what renowned naval historian Samuel Eliot Morison later called
12 an unprecedented number of German U-boats in the shipping lane;
13 and

14 WHEREAS, The crews of the British warships accompanying the
15 merchant vessels did their best to protect the convoy, but at
16 dawn on April 29, 1943, the German submarine U-258 fired on the
17 SS *McKeesport*, inflicting a mortal wound; and

18 WHEREAS, In his epic history of United States naval
19 operations, Mr. Morison writes that the SS *McKeesport*'s crew,
20 under the command of United States Naval Reserve Ensign Irving
21 H. Smith, "stood by their guns until ordered to abandon ship,"
22 but were unable to spot the U-boat and return fire; and

23 WHEREAS, Miraculously, the SS *McKeesport*'s captain, Oscar
24 John Lohr, and the majority of his 11-man crew, 31 other men and
25 a Navy armed guard gun crew of 25 survived the attack, with on-
26 board merchant seaman John A. Anderson being the only casualty;
27 and

28 WHEREAS, The ensuing battle lasted several days and by the
29 end of May 1943, with the help of the British Admiralty, the
30 German fleet lost 47 U-boats and withdrew from the North

1 Atlantic, resulting in the first major victory of convoy escorts
2 over U-boats; therefore be it

3 RESOLVED, That the Senate recognize the 68th anniversary of
4 the torpedoing of the SS *McKeesport* and honor those on board the
5 SS *McKeesport*, those who came to its defense and those involved
6 in the rescue effort who served with courage and distinction.