
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE RESOLUTION

No. 601 Session of
2008

INTRODUCED BY WILLIAMS, WHEATLEY, BLACKWELL, JAMES, PAYTON AND
D. O'BRIEN, FEBRUARY 14, 2008

INTRODUCED AS NONCONTROVERSIAL RESOLUTION UNDER RULE 35,
FEBRUARY 14, 2008

A RESOLUTION

1 Commemorating the achievements and contributions the late
2 Honorable K. Leroy Irvis made to the General Assembly and the
3 Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

4 WHEREAS, K. Leroy Irvis was born in Saugerties, New York, on
5 December 27, 1919; and

6 WHEREAS, In 1938 Mr. Irvis became only the second African
7 American to graduate from the University of New York State
8 Teachers College, graduating summa cum laude; and

9 WHEREAS, Mr. Irvis received a master's degree from the State
10 University of New York at Albany and earned a law degree from
11 the University of Pittsburgh; and

12 WHEREAS, Mr. Irvis put his master's degree in education to
13 good use teaching English and history in Baltimore high schools;
14 and

15 WHEREAS, Mr. Irvis became a civilian flying instructor in the
16 War Department during World War II; and

17 WHEREAS, As a young community activist in Pittsburgh, Mr.
18 Irvis organized the first demonstration in the United States

1 against department stores for their discriminatory hiring
2 practices against African Americans; and

3 WHEREAS, Mr. Irvis was elected to the Pennsylvania House of
4 Representatives in 1958 and was subsequently reelected 15
5 consecutive times; and

6 WHEREAS, Mr. Irvis served the House of Representatives and
7 the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania with distinction as Minority
8 Caucus Chairman, Majority Caucus Chairman, Minority Whip,
9 Minority Leader and Majority Leader; and

10 WHEREAS, Mr. Irvis was elected the 130th Speaker of the House
11 of Representatives, becoming the first Speaker of African-
12 American heritage in the United States; and

13 WHEREAS, In his acknowledgement speech upon becoming Speaker,
14 Mr. Irvis remarked, "You have elected not a black man to be
15 Speaker of the House of Representatives, but more importantly,
16 you have elected a man who happens to be black, and that is the
17 direction that this country must continue to go"; and

18 WHEREAS, Mr. Irvis served ably as Speaker from 1977 to 1978
19 and from 1983 to 1988 and sponsored a record 264 bills that
20 became law during his legislative career; and

21 WHEREAS, Mr. Irvis retired from politics in 1988 and then
22 authored a book of poems entitled "This Land of Fire"; and

23 WHEREAS, Mr. Irvis was also a gifted artist whose wood
24 sculptures have been displayed in exhibits throughout the United
25 States; and

26 WHEREAS, Mr. Irvis was a legislative leader in many areas of
27 public policy, including education, civil rights, health,
28 consumer protection, housing and governmental reform; and

29 WHEREAS, Many organizations and institutions have honored Mr.
30 Irvis for his distinguished record of public service, including

1 the NAACP, the University of Pennsylvania, Lincoln University of
2 Pennsylvania, the Urban League, the University of Pittsburgh and
3 the Pennsylvania Jewish Coalition; and

4 WHEREAS, As a fitting tribute to his distinguished service to
5 the General Assembly and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the
6 South Office Building in the Capitol Complex in Harrisburg has
7 been formally renamed the Speaker K. Leroy Irvis Office
8 Building; and

9 WHEREAS, On March 16, 2006, Mr. Irvis died at the age of 86;
10 therefore be it

11 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives honor and
12 commemorate the lifetime of service and achievement of the
13 Honorable K. Leroy Irvis.