



HR0871

LRB102 27780 LAW 39578 r

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HOUSE RESOLUTION

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WHEREAS, Merlin Kennedy and Henry Gay Sr. are true icons
3 of the civil rights movement in McLean County; and

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WHEREAS, Merlin Kennedy was born in Decatur on November 7,
5 1926; and

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WHEREAS, Merlin Kennedy was drafted into the U.S. Navy in
7 1945, and he served until 1949; and

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WHEREAS, Merlin Kennedy moved with his brother to
9 Bloomington in 1959, and he earned a position as a punch-press
10 operator; and

11

WHEREAS, Inspired by the 1960 NAACP state convention held
12 in Bloomington, Merlin Kennedy joined protesters at local
13 stores to call for an end to segregated lunch counters; and

14

WHEREAS, Merlin Kennedy was elected president of the local
15 NAACP chapter, spearheading the passage of the area's first
16 fair housing ordinance in 1967 and co-founding the Human
17 Relations Commissions in Bloomington and Normal; and

18

WHEREAS, Merlin Kennedy will long be remembered for his
19 best known act of civil defiance, participating in the 1966

1 Christmas Parade dressed as Santa Claus despite threats of
2 arrest; his bold action earned him the nickname "Black Santa";
3 and

4 WHEREAS, Merlin Kennedy was the first chair of the
5 Bloomington Human Relations Commission and the first recipient
6 of the Normal Human Relations Commission's Martin Luther King
7 Jr. Award; he was awarded the NAACP's Roy Wilkins Award in 1999
8 for his efforts to fight racism; and

9 WHEREAS, Merlin Kennedy was named a McLean County History
10 Maker in 2015; and

11 WHEREAS, Henry Gay Sr. was born near Shreveport, Louisiana
12 on August 5, 1924; and

13 WHEREAS, Henry Gay Sr. was a child of sharecroppers, and
14 he began his work life picking cotton in Arkansas at age nine;
15 and

16 WHEREAS, Henry Gay Sr. moved to Bloomington in 1945; he
17 secured his first local job on the Chicago and Alton Railroad,
18 burning weeds for a dollar a day; and

19 WHEREAS, Henry Gay Sr. first joined the local NAACP
20 chapter in 1951; he became the local branch secretary in 1968,

1 a position he held into the 21st century; and

2 WHEREAS, Henry Gay Sr. worked with other leaders of the
3 local civil rights community for equal access to housing,
4 education, and services; and

5 WHEREAS, Henry Gay Sr. has been honored for his tireless
6 efforts to end racial discrimination by a number of
7 organizations, including the NAACP and the Bloomington Human
8 Relations Commission; and

9 WHEREAS, Henry Gay Sr. was named a McLean County History
10 Maker in 2019; and

11 WHEREAS, Merlin Kennedy and Henry Gay Sr. played pivotal
12 roles in the success of the Bloomington-Normal NAACP; and

13 WHEREAS, The Bloomington community is honoring Merlin
14 Kennedy and Henry Gay Sr. for their contributions to the local
15 civil rights movement by dedicating streets in their names;
16 therefore, be it

17 RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE
18 HUNDRED SECOND GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that
19 we extend our sincere condolences to the family of Merlin
20 Kennedy for his passing, and we celebrate the achievements and

1 legacies of Merlin Kennedy and Henry Gay Sr., two
2 extraordinary men; and be it further

3 RESOLVED, That suitable copies of this resolution be
4 presented to the families of Merlin Kennedy and Henry Gay Sr.
5 as expressions of our esteem and respect.