

2001 SPECIAL SESSION I

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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 49

Offered July 10, 2001

Commending Gordon C. Willis, Sr.

Patrons—Cranwell, Thomas and Woodrum; Senator: Edwards

Unanimous consent to introduce

WHEREAS, Gordon C. Willis, born in Roanoke in 1920 to Holman and Bess Willis, is a graduate of Jefferson High School's class of 1938 and the United States Naval Academy class of 1943, and is a veteran of service with the United States Navy during and after World War II; and

WHEREAS, Gordon Willis served on a battleship that supported Marine landings in the Pacific Islands; and participated in the preparation for a dreaded invasion of Japan; and he served as an aviator and fighter pilot from 1945 to 1947 aboard the aircraft USS *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, flying F4U Corsairs; and

WHEREAS, Gordon Willis left the Navy and returned to Roanoke in 1947 at the urging of his father and became a successful businessman and influential community leader; and

WHEREAS, in 1958 Gordon Willis joined with other business leaders to establish the Roanoke Valley Development Corporation which launched efforts to attract industry to Roanoke and reversed an economic downturn in the Roanoke Valley created after the closing of the Viscoe rayon plant and Norfolk and Western Railway conversion to diesel engines from steam; and

WHEREAS, Gordon Willis led a nearly successful effort to route Interstate 64 through Lynchburg and Roanoke; and

WHEREAS, Gordon Willis was one of those, who worked diligently for peaceful desegregation in Roanoke and for inclusion of those who might not be accepted because of their race or religious beliefs; and

WHEREAS, Gordon Willis's tenacious efforts as head of the committee examining transportation between Blacksburg and Roanoke has made the revolutionary link of the so-called "Smart Road" a reality; and

WHEREAS, a person of great vision, Gordon Willis has diligently pursued his values of personal responsibility, duty, honor and faith; and

WHEREAS, Gordon Willis's selfless dedication has enhanced the prosperity and growth of the Roanoke Valley; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly commend and congratulate Gordon C. Willis, Sr.; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to Gordon C. Willis, Sr., as an expression of the General Assembly's appreciation for his efforts on behalf of the citizens of the Roanoke Valley.

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