

By: McClendon

H.R. No. 223

R E S O L U T I O N

1           WHEREAS, The nation lost a trailblazing leader with the death  
2 of San Antonio native Percy Ellis Sutton, whose remarkable life  
3 drew to a close on December 26, 2009, at the age of 89; and

4           WHEREAS, The son of a former slave, Mr. Sutton became one of  
5 New York City's most influential figures, distinguishing himself in  
6 the military, the law, business, and public service; he mentored  
7 and inspired several generations of African American activists and  
8 politicians, including former New York mayor David Dinkins, who  
9 once stated, "I stand on the shoulders of Percy Ellis Sutton"; and

10           WHEREAS, Born on November 24, 1920, Mr. Sutton was the  
11 youngest child of educators Lillian Viola Sutton and  
12 Samuel J. Sutton, Sr.; as a boy, he worked hard on the family's farm  
13 in Prairie View and joined his father in the fight for civil rights,  
14 passing out leaflets for the NAACP in the 1930s, despite the risk to  
15 his personal safety; he attended Tuskegee University, Hampton  
16 University, and Prairie View A&M University before interrupting his  
17 education to enlist in the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II;  
18 his service as an intelligence officer with the famed Tuskegee  
19 Airmen brought him two combat stars, and he went on to serve his  
20 country again during the Korean War, attaining the rank of captain;  
21 and

22           WHEREAS, The GI Bill enabled Mr. Sutton to enroll in Columbia  
23 Law School, and he went on to earn his degree at Brooklyn Law School  
24 while holding down two full-time jobs, as a subway conductor and a

1 postal employee; teaming with his brother Oliver, he opened a law  
2 practice in Harlem in 1953 and counted Malcolm X and boxing legend  
3 Sugar Ray Robinson among his first clients; as the civil rights  
4 movement gained momentum, he represented hundreds of protesters in  
5 the South and was himself arrested as a Freedom Rider; later, he  
6 assumed leadership of the New York City branch of the NAACP; and

7         WHEREAS, During the 1950s, Mr. Sutton began devoting his  
8 enormous energy and talent to the Democratic Party and participated  
9 in numerous campaigns; he won election to the New York State  
10 Assembly in 1964 and then served as president of the Borough of  
11 Manhattan for 11 years, beginning in 1966; after leaving office, he  
12 continued to share his political acumen with others while building  
13 a media empire that helped give greater voice to the African  
14 American community; and

15         WHEREAS, Inner City Broadcasting, a group of investors led by  
16 Mr. Sutton and his brother Oliver, bought the *New York Amsterdam*  
17 *News*, the city's largest African American newspaper, and an AM  
18 radio station, WLIB, which became the first African American-owned  
19 radio station in the metropolis; in 1974, the company bought an FM  
20 station, WBLS, which became the flagship for the urban music  
21 format; ICB eventually expanded into other markets across the  
22 country and acquired two cable television franchises; and

23         WHEREAS, A true visionary, Mr. Sutton guided the purchase and  
24 renovation of the Apollo Theater, and the restoration of this  
25 historic landmark sparked the revitalization of 125th Street and  
26 other parts of Harlem; he took his place on the world stage as well,  
27 accepting an invitation from President Bill Clinton to meet with

1 international business leaders during the 1995-1996 Group of Seven  
2 Nations conference; and

3 WHEREAS, Mr. Sutton served on the national board of the NAACP  
4 from 1989 to 1992 and raised funds as chair of the Great Black  
5 American Artists Dinner Series; moreover, he established the annual  
6 NAACP Lillian & Samuel Sutton Education Scholarship in honor of his  
7 parents, and the organization accorded him its highest honor, the  
8 Springarn Medal; in all his endeavors, he enjoyed the love and  
9 support of his wife, Leatrice, and his children, Cheryl L. Sutton  
10 and Pierre "Pepe" Sutton; and

11 WHEREAS, Few individuals can claim achievements as  
12 far-reaching as those of Percy Sutton; "Mr. Chairman," as he was  
13 known, was admired for his dapper style and gracious personality,  
14 as well as for his brilliance, eloquence, and drive, and his  
15 profound commitment to social progress will continue to inspire  
16 others for many years to come; now, therefore, be it

17 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives of the 82nd Texas  
18 Legislature, 1st Called Session, hereby pay special tribute to the  
19 life and legacy of Percy Ellis Sutton.