

HOUSE BILL 4051
By Coleman

AN ACT to name the Tennessee State Veterans' Home in Murfreesboro in honor of former Representative Ivory O. "I.V." Hillis.

WHEREAS, it is most fitting that this General Assembly should act to name a state veterans' facility to honor one of the greatest champions of veterans and their rights that this state has ever known: Representative I.V. Hillis; and

WHEREAS, in his first race for public office, Ivory O. "I.V." Hillis won election in 1970 to the Tennessee General Assembly's House of Representatives; for twenty-four years, he ably represented the good people of House District 43, which included White County and a substantial segment of Warren County; and

WHEREAS, from 1978 until his much deserved retirement in 1994, I.V. Hillis was the dynamic and influential chairman of the House Conservation and Environment Committee; and

WHEREAS, a proud veteran of the U.S. Air Force who worked in air traffic control during his active duty, Chairman Hillis later served as Commander of American Legion Post 173 in McMinnville; and

WHEREAS, as health and housing concerns for America's World War II Veterans emerged in the public arena in the mid-1970s, the necessity of adequately addressing the needs of those who had served so bravely in defending their nation became apparent; one visible result of this movement was the creation of the General Assembly's Select Joint Committee on Veterans Affairs in 1978; and

WHEREAS, then Speaker of the House Ned McWherter appointed I.V. Hillis as the first Chairman of the Select Joint Committee on Veterans Affairs, and he served with dedication and distinction in that capacity until his retirement sixteen years later; and

WHEREAS, essential to the Committee's work was research into the needs of Tennessee veterans, and for that purpose the group toured five geographically diverse sites to solicit input from those most directly affected. A defining moment in the process came, Mr. Hillis recalls, when an active-duty captain at the Millington Naval Air Station challenged the lawmakers to "provide adequate and timely medical support to veterans and a decent place for them to be buried"; and

WHEREAS, Maine and Mississippi were two states in the early 1980s that had accepted an offer by the U.S. government to build facilities for the comfortable and healthful retirement of veterans, provided the individual states assured continuing operating funds for those group homes. After visiting the Augusta, Maine site, Chairman Hillis and his committee recommended a similar program in Tennessee. Concerned about the perpetual expense to the state in staffing and maintaining a veterans' retirement home in Tennessee, some Administration officials opposed the initiative; and

WHEREAS, as a demonstration of support for the concept, Chairman Hillis called on the state's American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Disabled American Veterans posts to rally at Legislative Plaza. When more than 1,600 Tennessee veterans showed up—vastly more than the Plaza could hold—the "blue caps" were ushered into the War Memorial Auditorium, an appropriate meeting place for those who had braved the dangers and hardships of war to protect America and to defend her civic and moral values. Confronted with such a manifestation of support for the committee's proposal, the Administration's opposition quickly melted; and

WHEREAS, through Chairman Hillis's inspired leadership and singular political acumen, legislation establishing the Tennessee State Veterans' Homes program, as well as its administrative board, was enacted by an overwhelming margin by the 95th General Assembly in 1988; and

WHEREAS, soon after the passage of this landmark legislation, ground was broken for the construction of the first Tennessee State Veterans' Home in Murfreesboro; and

WHEREAS, although he is no stranger to honors and accolades, I.V. Hillis considers his work in passing the enabling legislation for the Tennessee State Veterans' Home program to be one of the most important accomplishments in his personal life and in his peerless career in public service; and

WHEREAS, because of the instrumental role that Chairman Hillis played in the establishment of the Tennessee State Veterans' Home program and its first facility, the Tennessee State Veterans' Home Board has petitioned this Body to name its Murfreesboro facility in honor of our most valued colleague, I.V. Hillis, a proposal with which this General Assembly most heartily concurs; now, therefore,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, the Tennessee State Veterans' Home in Murfreesboro is hereby designated the "I.V. Hillis Tennessee State Veterans' Home" as a lasting tribute to one of the most ardent and effective supporters of veterans that this state has ever produced.

SECTION 2. The Tennessee State Veterans' Home Board is directed to erect or affix suitable signs designating the Tennessee State Veterans' Home in Murfreesboro as the "I.V. Hillis Tennessee State Veterans' Home".

SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.