

CHAPTER NO. 617

HOUSE BILL NO. 3180

By Representative Fowlkes

Substituted for: Senate Bill No. 3200

By Senator Ketron

AN ACT to name a bridge on U.S. Highway 31-A in Marshall County in honor of Lawton Tarpley.

WHEREAS, from time to time, the members of this General Assembly have seen fit to name certain highways and bridges to honor those exemplary public servants who have contributed significantly to the growth and prosperity of their respective communities; and

WHEREAS, no Tennessean is more deserving of this honor than Lawton Tarpley, a successful farmer and gifted teacher who served the vocational agriculture students at Cornersville High School with the utmost ability, dedication, and compassion for forty years; and

WHEREAS, Lawton Tarpley is a person of impeccable morals and irreproachable integrity, and he worked assiduously to establish a brighter future for the good people of Cornersville as their Mayor, spearheading numerous civic improvement projects during his illustrious tenure in office; and

WHEREAS, "I believe in the future of farming, with a faith born not of words, but of deeds..." is the beginning of the Future Farmer Creed. This creed has been recited by the many vocational agriculture students who passed through the classes of Lawton Tarpley. While Mr. Tarpley did not write the creed, he could have, because he certainly lived it; and

WHEREAS, Sam Lawton Tarpley was born October 1, 1914, in Watertown, Tennessee, to Sam Whorton "Hoyt" Tarpley and Josie Elsie Griffin. Lawton was the youngest of three boys. Almond was born in 1909, and Fred was born in 1912. While the family was poor in many regards, it was rich in love, family relationships, and ethics. The three brothers grew up in a home that valued their church, an education, and a love of the land. Many weeks during revival time, the visiting preacher would stay in the Tarpley's home. Almond eventually became a farmer, Fred became a pastor, and Lawton became a teacher; and

WHEREAS, Hoyt Tarpley only finished the third grade but saw the value of an education. He sometimes rode to school with the boys on their two horses or the boys would ride in a buggy. At the age of 4, Lawton began attending a one-room school house with his older brothers. In 1920, his father bought a Model T Ford. Getting to ride in the Model T was a luxury, even though it did not have doors or windows and had to be crank-started. On winter days, they would even have to drain the radiator when they got to school and then refill it before heading for home; and

WHEREAS, Lawton Tarpley attended Watertown High School, and graduated in 1931 (at the age of 16). He was an active member of their newly-created Future Farmers of America (FFA) organization; and

WHEREAS, in the fall of 1931, Lawton Tarpley went to the University of Tennessee in Knoxville to major in agriculture. He hitch hiked to Knoxville two weeks before the start of the fall quarter to look for a job, but did not find one. Lawton was very homesick at Knoxville until his older brother, Fred, and his high school friend arrived. They stayed the quarter in a boarding house, four to a room; and

WHEREAS, Lawton Tarpley had borrowed \$100 from his grandfather for college. His ROTC uniform cost \$45, so not much was left for his books, meals, and lodging. His mother would send what groceries she could from home; and

WHEREAS, during his sophomore year, Mr. Tarpley and a friend washed lunch and supper dishes at a boarding house for their meals. They would sometimes not finish with all of the dishes until 7:00 or 8:00 p.m., and then would have to study; and

WHEREAS, the agriculture campus was about a mile from "the Hill" at Knoxville, and with only five minutes between classes, the ag students had to rush and try to find rides back and forth to class; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Tarpley was forced to leave UT in the spring of 1933 because he was needed at home to help on the farm due to his father's illness. He did manage to attend the ROTC summer camp at the old Camp Peay (later Camp Forrest) in Tullahoma. Because of some bad experiences at camp, when it was over, he took a train back to Knoxville, turned in his uniform, and hitch hiked back home; and

WHEREAS, in 1934, Lawton Tarpley started back to college, and made up the classes he missed. He graduated from UT in June, 1936; and

WHEREAS, while looking for a job teaching vocational agriculture, he and a friend were both told about positions in Cornersville and a couple of other towns. Lawton Tarpley came to Cornersville, which had a reputation for "running off" ag teachers. Soon after finding a place to stay, he started trying to meet the boys he would be teaching. One local farmer bet Lawton a soft drink that he would not survive until Christmas. The farmer lost the bet, but Lawton never did get his soft drink; and

WHEREAS, after completing a year of teaching and advising the FFA students, Lawton Tarpley went back to Wilson County and married Ina Rebecca Phillips on June 27, 1937. Soon after bringing his bride to Cornersville, he went to visit some of his students who lived in the community of Yell. Ina thought Lawton had gone crazy and was screaming out some of his frustrations when he left her a note that said "Gone to Yell"; and

WHEREAS, on August 13, 1938, Lawton and Ina Tarpley had their first son, Jimmy. Their second son, Philip, was born October 31, 1949. Jimmy is presently retired and living back in Cornersville after working in Nashville, Tennessee, for many years. Philip is currently a middle school teacher in Manchester, Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Tarpley taught vocational agriculture in Cornersville from 1936 until he retired in 1972 after 36 years of teaching. During his teaching career, in addition to agriculture, he taught physics and mathematics, coached football, and had other administrative duties. Also, during his teaching career when a student misbehaved, he was known to take the unruly student "out to the woodshed" and this usually solved the problem. One of his students even made a plaque for his door, officially labeling it "The Woodshed"; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Tarpley was able to “practice what he was teaching”, as he was a successful farmer himself, raising cows, chickens, hogs, and crops in tobacco, corn, and hay. Because of his tender care for his animals and helping his students with theirs, somewhere along the line he earned the nickname of “Doc”; and

WHEREAS, his agricultural career was distinguished, as he coached many of his students on prize-winning teams in soil judging, parliamentary procedure, and public speaking. Mr. Tarpley had several state FFA winners and attended a couple of national competitions as well; and

WHEREAS, in October of 1973, the new ag teacher left for another job. Mr. Tarpley was “persuaded” to finish out the year. He taught until 1977 and retired a second time, making a total of 40 years teaching in Cornersville. During his years leading the vocational agriculture students in Cornersville, he received an Honorary Chapter Farmer award and an Honorary State Farmer award. In 1978, Lawton was honored to receive the highest of these awards, the Honorary American Farmer award in Kansas City, Missouri; and

WHEREAS, while dedicated to his task of raising up students to love the land and to love farming, Mr. Tarpley also loved his Lord. He was active in the church that he and Mrs. Tarpley attended. They both were Sunday School teachers for many years at Cornersville Baptist Church. Mr. Tarpley has served the church as a Deacon for most of the years he has attended and was the Chairman of the Deacons from 1953-1993; and

WHEREAS, during his first retirement, Mr. Tarpley ran for and was elected Mayor of Cornersville and served in that capacity until 1980, when he moved outside the city limits of Cornersville and was ineligible to serve; and

WHEREAS, within the last few years, Mr. Tarpley took some of his farm land and began the Cornerstone subdivision in an effort to help Cornersville grow; and

WHEREAS, recently, Mr. Tarpley retired from farming. Lawton and Ina Tarpley have always been interested in helping others. This past year, Mr. Tarpley established a college scholarship for students at Cornersville High School who are interested in making agriculture their vocation; and

WHEREAS, one of Mr. Tarpley’s favorite sayings is, “A job worth doing is worth doing right, or it’s not worth doing at all,” and he has definitely lived his life that way. Mr. Tarpley taught and influenced thousands of students over the years. Hopefully, they learned at least this much from him; and

WHEREAS, in the closing ceremony of the FFA chapter meetings, there is a phrase about being “honest and fair in the game of life.” The writers of this must have had Lawton Tarpley in mind; and

WHEREAS, this General Assembly finds it appropriate to celebrate Mr. Tarpley’s bountiful life of purpose and commitment to his community and fellow citizens by naming a bridge on U.S. Highway 31-A in Cornersville in his honor; 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 bridge spanning Richland Creek on U.S. Highway 31-A within the corporate limits of the Town of Cornersville (between Interstate Highway 65 and downtown Cornersville) in Marshall County is hereby designated the "Lawton Tarpley Bridge" as a fitting tribute to an excellent public servant, dedicated educator, and even more accomplished human being.

SECTION 2. The department of transportation is directed to erect suitable signs or to affix suitable markers designating the bridge described in Section 1 as the "Lawton Tarpley Bridge".

SECTION 3. The erection of such directional signs shall be within the guidelines prescribed by the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices.

SECTION 4. This act shall become operative only if the federal highway administrator advises the commissioner of transportation in writing that the provisions of this act shall not render Tennessee in violation of federal laws and regulations and subject to penalties prescribed therein.

SECTION 5.

(1) This act shall become operative only if Marshall County, Tennessee, either remits the estimated cost of the erection of such signs to the department of transportation within one (1) year of the effective date of this act or manufactures such signs in accordance with the provisions of subdivision (2). Marshall County shall make such payment prior to any expenditure by the state for the manufacture or installation of such signs. The department shall return any unused portion of the estimated cost to Marshall County within thirty (30) days of the erection of such signs. If the actual cost exceeds the estimated cost, Marshall County shall remit an amount equal to the difference in such costs to the department within thirty (30) days of receiving an itemized invoice of the actual cost from the department.

(2) Marshall County may manufacture and erect such signs provided, that such signs are manufactured and erected pursuant to state and federal guidelines and approved by the department.

SECTION 6. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.

PASSED: April 22, 2004


JIMMY NAIFEH, SPEAKER
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES


JOHN S. WILDER
SPEAKER OF THE SENATE

APPROVED this 5th day of May 2004


PHIL BREDESEN, GOVERNOR