

Legislation Text

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Recognizing and Honoring Emlen Tunnell for His Courageous Military Service During World War II and His Historic Achievement as the First African American Inducted Into The National Football League Hall of Fame.

WHEREAS, Mr. Emlen Lewis Tunnell was born in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania in 1925 and grew up in the Philadelphia suburb of Radnor, Pennsylvania. As a young man, Mr. Tunnell was honored as an All-State athlete in both basketball and football during his years at Radnor High School; and

WHEREAS, Emlen Tunnell received after high school an athletic scholarship to attend the University of Toledo. Suffering a near-lethal neck injury during his first year of collegiate football, Mr. Tunnell awoke to a priest administering last rites over his hospital bed. At 17 years old, doctors told Mr. Tunnell his career was over; and

WHEREAS, At the dawn of U.S. involvement in World War II, Tunnell enlisted with the United States Coast Guard. On two separate occasions, Emlen Tunnell saved the lives of shipmates, including Mr. Fred Shaver whom Tunnell saved from an explosion caused by a Japanese torpedo, and Mr. Alfred Givens, whom Tunnell rescued from freezing waters. Emlen Tunnell was nominated for the Silver Lifesaving Medal, a display of public recognition not customarily provided to African Americans during his time of service; and

WHEREAS, Following the end of World War II, Emlen Tunnell became the first African American to play for the New York Giants. Emlen Tunnell had a phenomenal career in the National Football League, earning nine Pro Bowl Selections in his fourteen years as a professional. Following his outstanding career on the field, Emlen Tunnell was the first African American assistant coach in the NFL. Subsequently, in 1967, Emlen Tunnell became the first African American inducted into the NFL's Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio. Mr. Tunnell reached his untimely demise in 1975 at the age of 50 while coaching with the New York Giants; and

WHEREAS, Emlen Tunnell is commemorated as a "man of firsts", receiving outstanding honors and admiration as an African American football player during an era of extraordinary prejudice. Emlen Tunnell is remembered by peers and teammates for his refusal to let racism and discrimination limit the determination with which he led his decorated career as a football player and as a serviceman. Emlen Tunnell is survived by family, friends, and teammates who remember him for his gregarious character, skillful leadership, and audacious spirit; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That we hereby recognize and honor Emlen Tunnell for his courageous military service during World War II and his historic achievement as the first African American inducted into the National Football League Hall of Fame,

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to the family of Emlen Tunnell as evidence of the sincere sentiments of this legislative body.