

2026 Regular Session

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 54

BY REPRESENTATIVE CHASSION

A RESOLUTION

To honor the life of former Xavier University of Louisiana President Dr. Norman C. Francis and designates February 18, 2026, as Norman Francis Day at the state capitol.

WHEREAS, Norman C. Francis was born in 1931 in Lafayette, Louisiana, and he moved to New Orleans to attend Xavier University of Louisiana; and

WHEREAS, while studying at Xavier, Dr. Francis was elected class president during each of his undergraduate years and student body president during his senior year; and

WHEREAS, after graduating in 1952, Dr. Francis enrolled in Loyola University School of Law, where he became the school's first African American graduate in 1955; shortly after earning a juris doctor, he received his draft order and enlisted in the United States Army; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Francis was hired by Xavier University in 1957 and served as dean of men, the first of his many roles with the educational institution; he served as an attorney litigating civil rights cases in Louisiana prior to *Brown v. Board of Education* and played a key role in the civil rights movement; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Francis was chosen to serve as the first lay president of Xavier University in 1968 at the age of thirty-seven; under his leadership, the university strengthened its Catholic and historically Black identity and expanded its national reputation, particularly in the sciences and health professions; and

WHEREAS, as president, Dr. Francis led Xavier University through a period of unparalleled growth, new partnerships, and prominence as one of the country's premier HBCUs; today, the university is recognized as a leading producer of Black graduates who go on to earn medical degrees; he retired in 2015, after forty-seven years of impactful service, and his presidency stands among the longest in U.S. higher education history; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Francis cofounded Liberty Bank and Trust Company, one of the oldest and largest Black-owned banks in the United States, to provide financial services to marginalized Black communities; he also helped the city of New Orleans acquire its first NFL franchise by investing in the New Orleans Saints and the development of the Superdome; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Francis was hailed as a monumental figure in philanthropy and education; he served as chair of the United Negro College Fund and held leadership roles on numerous corporate, foundation, and nonprofit boards; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Francis was a leading voice among Catholic higher education presidents and helped shape the conversation on the implications of the papal encyclical *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* and the role of Catholic identity in American higher education; he also founded the Institute for Black Catholic Studies; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Francis was a trusted civic leader who played a pivotal role in the rebuilding of New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina; his presence helped anchor the city's recovery with integrity, collaboration, and hope, and his work was an important factor in his receipt of the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President George W. Bush in 2006; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Francis deservedly received countless honors and accolades, but his most lasting legacy is found in the memory of his inspiring character, which was defined by quiet strength, deep faith, disciplined leadership, and steadfast belief in students; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Norman C. Francis led without spectacle and was guided by the unshakeable conviction that excellence and ethics are inseparable; he was a truly singular figure in Louisiana and American history, and his life is worthy of the highest recognition.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the House of Representatives of the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby honor the life of former Xavier University of Louisiana President Dr. Norman C. Francis and does hereby designate February 18, 2026, as Norman Francis Day at the state capitol.

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SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES