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**HISTORY OF LEGISLATIVE ACTIONS**

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View the latest  [legislative information](https://www.scstatehouse.gov/billsearch.php?billnumbers=680&session=126&summary=B)  at the website

**VERSIONS OF THIS BILL**

[05/28/2025](https://www.scstatehouse.gov/sess126_2025-2026/prever/680_20250528.docx)

A senate RESOLUTION

TO CONGRATULATE THOMAS C. BARNWELL JR. OF BEAUFORT COUNTY ON THE OCCASION OF HIS 90TH BIRTHDAY AND TO WISH HIM MUCH HAPPINESS IN THE DAYS AHEAD.

Whereas, on June 2, 2025, Thomas C. Barnwell Jr. of Beaufort County will awaken to the celebration of a milestone event, his 90th birthday; and

Whereas, born on Hilton Head Island as a direct descendant of the freedmen of Mitchelville, Thomas Barnwell attended Hilton Head Elementary, Hilton Head Junior High and Penn Schools, graduating from St. Helena High School in 1954. He furthered his education at Claflin College, Tuskegee Institute, Fisk University, University of the West Indies, University of Ontario, University of Puerto Rico, and University of Michigan; and

Whereas, beginning in the early 1960s, Mr. Barnwell was the field director of community development at the Penn Center, one of the nation’s first schools for formerly enslaved people. In that capacity, he played a central role as the center served as a safe haven and planning ground for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, personally transporting Dr. King and engaging in strategic conversations around civil rights organizing. It was at this historic and cultural institution he cultivated his commitment to nonviolence, education, and justice that shaped his leadership for decades; and

Whereas, throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, Thomas Barnwell led the formation of Beaufort‑Jasper Comprehensive Health Services, a multi‑center healthcare network which now serves over 25,000 people across the Lowcountry. Additionally, he appeared on CBS’s *60 Minutes* to expose health disparities in the Lowcountry, garnering national attention; and

Whereas, Mr. Barnwell co‑founded the Hilton Head Fishing Cooperative, securing economic opportunity for local Black fishermen; served on the boards of the Bluffton Oyster Cooperative, Beaufort‑Jasper Comprehensive Health, and numerous local nonprofits; and participated in John F. Kennedy Jr.’s To Fulfill These Rights Committee and testified before the U.S. Senate on hunger and malnutrition; and

Whereas, beginning in the 1980s, Thomas Barnwell developed affordable housing and advocated for land retention and economic stability for islanders amidst tourism‑driven development pressures, eventually being inducted in the Hilton Head Island Hall of Fame for his lifelong contributions to community empowerment, cultural preservation, and civil rights; and

Whereas, Mr. Barnwell became the founding chairman of the Mitchelville Preservation Project, formalizing the vision to collect stories and artifacts that demonstrate the richness of the story of the location as well as preserve and educate the public about historic Mitchelville. Drafting bylaws, securing nonprofit status, and creating the original master plan for the park, he championed Mitchelville not just as a historic site, but as a living testament to his own ancestors’ legacy and a story of freedom through self‑determination; and

Whereas, most recently he co‑authored *Gullah Days: Hilton Head Islanders Before the Bridge (1861‑1956)* documenting the stories of Hilton Head’s earliest Gullah Families. It is because of these accomplishments, as well as countless affiliations, awards, volunteer service, and recognitions that Thomas Barnwell continues to be revered as a bridge‑builder, truth‑teller, and keeper of history for Hilton Head Island and the Gullah Geechee community; and

Whereas, it is a great pleasure for the Senate to honor an individual such as Thomas C. Barnwell Jr. who has given so much to his community and to join with his family and friends in congratulating him on reaching this important life milestone. Now, therefore,

Be it resolved by the Senate:

That the members of the South Carolina Senate, by this resolution, congratulate Thomas C. Barnwell Jr. of Beaufort County on the occasion of his 90th birthday and wish him much happiness in the days ahead.

Be it further resolved that a copy of this resolution be presented to Thomas C. Barnwell Jr.

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