



HR0977

LRB104 22311 ECR 38750 r

1 HOUSE RESOLUTION

2 WHEREAS, The vast resources of the Illinois Basin
3 transformed the Village of Westville and many other towns in
4 Illinois from small agricultural settlements into major
5 industrial powerhouses; and

6 WHEREAS, Coal mining in Vermilion County began when coal
7 mine developer William Kirkland and others began mining in the
8 Grape Creek area around 1866; due to labor scarcity, Kirkland
9 imported the first miners to the area, including a shipload of
10 Belgian miners brought in to instruct the other early miners
11 on how to start the slopes and how to mine coal profitably; and

12 WHEREAS, Westville's first post office was established in
13 1876, and coal mining began in the village when developers
14 opened numerous coal mines around 1880, with the shaft of the
15 first mine being sunk by the Himrod Coal Company in Himrod in
16 1895; the mine was later sold to Mike Kelly, who eventually
17 owned at least five mines in the area and operated the
18 village's first bank alongside John Dickerson; the village
19 opened its first saloon in connection with a hotel in 1890, and
20 at one point, it was reportedly home to more than 28 taverns;
21 and

22 WHEREAS, The employment opportunity created by the mines

1 caused many towns around Vermilion County to become a melting
2 pot of immigrants, including people from Belgium, Lithuania,
3 Russia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Italy, and other countries;
4 these immigrants struggled with the language barrier and often
5 tried to settle near their own people, which was the case for
6 the Belgian immigrants who settled north of Westville,
7 resulting in the area becoming known as Belgiumtown; and

8 WHEREAS, In the early 1900s, Illinois was split between
9 wet and dry townships in the years prior to Prohibition,
10 leading the former Belgiumtown to officially be organized as
11 the Village of Belgium in 1908, and it opted to serve as a wet
12 township as nearby townships voted to become dry, thereby
13 allowing taverns to operate; and

14 WHEREAS, The economic boom created by the mining industry
15 led to the Chicago and Eastern Illinois Railroad to run
16 through Westville, leading to the construction of a now
17 memorialized train depot in the village, with trains carrying
18 many coal miners back and forth; and

19 WHEREAS, Westville created a memorial to its miners in
20 1968, honoring these individuals for making the community a
21 melting pot of nations and proving that people of all
22 nationalities can work and live together; therefore, be it

1 RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE
2 HUNDRED FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that
3 we declare June 9, 2026 as Ode to the Coal Miners Day in the
4 State of Illinois to honor the contributions of coal miners in
5 developing communities across our State, adding to our State's
6 rich history; and be it further

7 RESOLVED, That we encourage citizens across Illinois to
8 recognize coal miners and to learn more about how they
9 contributed to the development of our great State.