

**Introduced by Senator Gaines
(Coauthors: Senators Fuller, Nielsen, and Pan)**

May 5, 2016

Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 139—Relative to the Merle Haggard Memorial Highway.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SCR 139, as introduced, Gaines. Merle Haggard Memorial Highway.

This measure would designate a specified portion of Interstate 5 from Kern County to Shasta County as the Merle Haggard Memorial Highway. The measure would also request the Department of Transportation to determine the cost of appropriate signs showing this special designation and, upon receiving donations from nonstate sources covering that cost, to erect those signs.

Fiscal committee: yes.

- 1 WHEREAS, Merle Ronald Haggard was born to James and
- 2 Flossie Haggard on April 6, 1937, in Oildale, just north of
- 3 Bakersfield, California. Merle's father was a railroad worker, and
- 4 Merle grew up during the Great Depression. He lived with his
- 5 family in a boxcar that they had converted into a home. As a child,
- 6 Merle suffered from a respiratory condition that frequently kept
- 7 him out of school and confined to bed rest; and
- 8 WHEREAS, James Haggard died from a brain tumor when
- 9 Merle was nine years of age. After his father's death, Merle became
- 10 rebellious. In an attempt to straighten her son out, his mother put
- 11 him in several juvenile detention centers, but it had little effect on
- 12 Merle's behavior; and

1 WHEREAS, As a teenager, Merle fell in love with country
2 music, particularly Bob Wills, Lefty Frizzell, and Hank Williams.
3 When he was 12 years of age, Merle was given his first guitar by
4 his older brother. He then taught himself how to play by listening
5 to records. Continuing to rebel, he went to Texas with his friend
6 Bob Teague and, after returning to California, he moved to
7 Modesto, where he made his performing debut with Teague at a
8 bar named the Fun Center. The two were paid five dollars and
9 given all the beer that they could drink; and

10 WHEREAS, In 1958, at 20 years of age, Merle was sent to San
11 Quentin State Prison after being convicted of burglary and
12 attempted escape from county jail. While serving a
13 two-and-one-half-year term, he played in the prison's country band
14 and took high school equivalency courses. He also was a member
15 of the audience when Johnny Cash made his legendary 1959
16 performance at the prison. Merle Haggard would later be officially
17 pardoned in 1972 by then-Governor Ronald Reagan; and

18 WHEREAS, In 1962 Merle Haggard signed with a small label
19 called Tally Records for whom he recorded five songs, including
20 his debut single, "Sing a Sad Song," which rose to No. 19 on the
21 country music charts. In 1965 he formed his own band, The
22 Strangers, before signing with Capitol Records, and later that year
23 the band released their debut self-titled album. Their followup
24 album, "Swinging Doors," reached No. 1 on the country music
25 charts the following year, and in 1967 their single "I'm a Lonesome
26 Fugitive" did the same. Later that year, Merle Haggard continued
27 his runaway success with "Branded Man," his first self-penned
28 No. 1 song; and

29 WHEREAS, During the remainder of the 1960s, Merle Haggard
30 produced a string of No. 1 singles, culminating with what would
31 become his signature song and his most controversial recording,
32 "Okie from Muskogee." Released in 1969, the song became an
33 anthem for middle Americans whose patriotism and traditional
34 values were under attack from Vietnam War protesters and hippies.
35 "Okie from Muskogee" crossed over to the pop charts and in 1970
36 earned Merle Haggard the Country Music Association's awards
37 for Single, Entertainer, and Top Male Vocalist of the Year. The
38 album of the same name also won Album of the Year; and

39 WHEREAS, Merle Haggard released nearly 70 albums and 600
40 songs, 250 of which he wrote himself. Among his most memorable

1 albums were “The Fightin’ Side of Me” (1970), “Someday We’ll
2 Look Back” (1971), “If We Make It Through December” (1974),
3 and “A Working Man Can’t Get Nowhere Today” (1977). In 1982
4 he recorded a duet album with George Jones called “A Taste of
5 Yesterday’s Wine,” which yielded the chart toppers “Yesterday’s
6 Wine” and “C.C. Waterback.” The following year, he collaborated
7 with Willie Nelson to record the widely praised compilation
8 “Pancho & Lefty.” In addition to an impressive title track, “Pancho
9 & Lefty” featured the touching ballads “It’s My Lazy Day,” “Half
10 a Man,” “Reasons to Quit,” and “All the Soft Places to Fall”; and

11 WHEREAS, Merle Haggard was elected to the Songwriters Hall
12 of Fame in 1977. In 1994 his wealth of artistic achievements,
13 including 38 No. 1 hits, earned him induction into the Country
14 Music Hall of Fame. Though his musical output waned over the
15 years, he continued to find success with albums such as “If I Could
16 Fly” (2000), “Haggard Like Never Before” (2003), and his 2015
17 reunion album with Willie Nelson, “Djano & Jimmie,” which
18 placed him atop the country music charts one more time; and

19 WHEREAS, In 2008 Merle Haggard was diagnosed with lung
20 cancer and underwent surgery to remove a tumor. Reflecting on
21 the situation, he referred to it as “the greatest test of my fortitude”;
22 and

23 WHEREAS, Merle Haggard was married five times. At the time
24 of his death, he was married to Theresa Lane, whom he married
25 in 1993. He had three children from his marriage to Leona Hobbs
26 and two children with Lane; and

27 WHEREAS, Merle Haggard died at home on his northern
28 California ranch in Palo Cedro in Shasta County on April 6, 2016,
29 his 79th birthday. He had been suffering from double pneumonia
30 and had to cancel a string of scheduled concerts with Willie Nelson.
31 The 11 days he spent trying to recover from his illness had become
32 so difficult that he reportedly told his friends and family that he
33 would die on his birthday; now, therefore, be it

34 *Resolved by the Senate of the State of California, the Assembly*
35 *thereof concurring*, That the Legislature hereby designates the
36 portion of Interstate 5 from the junction at State Route 46 in Kern
37 County to the junction at State Route 44 in Shasta County as the
38 Merle Haggard Memorial Highway; and be it further

39 *Resolved*, That the Department of Transportation is requested
40 to determine the cost of appropriate signs consistent with the

1 signing requirements for the state highway system showing this
2 special designation and, upon receiving donations from nonstate
3 sources sufficient to cover the cost, to erect those signs; and be it
4 further
5 *Resolved*, That the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies of
6 this resolution to the Director of Transportation and to the author
7 for appropriate distribution.

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