

AMENDED IN SENATE JUNE 9, 2016

**Senate Concurrent Resolution**

**No. 139**

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

May 5, 2016

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Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 139—Relative to the Merle Haggard Memorial ~~Highway~~: *Overpass*.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SCR 139, as amended, Gaines. Merle Haggard Memorial ~~Highway~~: *Overpass*.

This measure would designate ~~a specified portion~~ *the overpass at the interchange* of Interstate 5 ~~from Kern County to Shasta County and State Highway Route 44~~ as the Merle Haggard Memorial ~~Highway~~: *Overpass*. 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

1 rebellious. In an attempt to straighten her son out, his mother put  
2 him in several juvenile detention centers, but it had little effect on  
3 Merle's behavior; and

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

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

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

34 WHEREAS, During the remainder of the 1960s, Merle Haggard  
35 produced a string of No. 1 singles, culminating with what would  
36 become his signature song and his most controversial recording,  
37 "Okie from Muskogee." Released in 1969, the song became an  
38 anthem for middle Americans whose patriotism and traditional  
39 values were under attack from Vietnam War protesters and hippies.  
40 "Okie from Muskogee" crossed over to the pop charts and in 1970

1 earned Merle Haggard the Country Music Association’s awards  
2 for Single, Entertainer, and Top Male Vocalist of the Year. The  
3 album of the same name also won Album of the Year; and

4 WHEREAS, Merle Haggard released nearly 70 albums and 600  
5 songs, 250 of which he wrote himself. Among his most memorable  
6 albums were “The Fightin’ Side of Me” (1970), “Someday We’ll  
7 Look Back” (1971), “If We Make It Through December” (1974),  
8 and “A Working Man Can’t Get Nowhere Today” (1977). In 1982  
9 he recorded a duet album with George Jones called “A Taste of  
10 Yesterday’s Wine,” which yielded the chart toppers “Yesterday’s  
11 Wine” and “C.C. Waterback.” The following year, he collaborated  
12 with Willie Nelson to record the widely praised compilation  
13 “Pancho & Lefty.” In addition to an impressive title track, “Pancho  
14 & Lefty” featured the touching ballads “It’s My Lazy Day,” “Half  
15 a Man,” “Reasons to Quit,” and “All the Soft Places to Fall”; and

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

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

28 WHEREAS, ~~Merle Haggard was married five times.~~ At the time  
29 of his death, ~~he~~ *Merle Haggard* was married to Theresa Lane,  
30 whom he married in 1993. He had three children from his marriage  
31 to Leona Hobbs and two children with Lane; and

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

39 *Resolved by the Senate of the State of California, the Assembly*  
40 *thereof concurring,* That the Legislature hereby designates the

1 ~~portion of overpass on Interstate 5 at the interchange of Interstate~~  
2 ~~5 from the junction at State Route 46 in Kern County to the~~  
3 ~~junction at and State Highway Route 44 in Shasta County in the~~  
4 ~~City of Redding as the Merle Haggard Memorial Highway;~~  
5 ~~Overpass; and be it further~~  
6 *Resolved*, That the Department of Transportation is requested  
7 to determine the cost of appropriate signs *to be placed on Interstate*  
8 *5, north and south*, consistent with the signing requirements for  
9 the state highway system showing this special designation and,  
10 upon receiving donations from nonstate sources sufficient to cover  
11 the cost, to erect those signs; and be it further  
12 *Resolved*, That the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies of  
13 this resolution to the Director of Transportation and to the author  
14 for appropriate distribution.

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