

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY AUGUST 9, 2016

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 Overpass.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SCR 139, as amended, Gaines. Merle Haggard Memorial Overpass.

This measure would designate the overpass at the interchange of Interstate 5 and State Highway Route 44 *in the City of Redding* as the Merle Haggard Memorial 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  
10 rebellious. In an attempt to straighten her son out, his mother put

1 him in several juvenile detention centers, but it had little effect on  
2 Merle's behavior; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

37 *Resolved by the Senate of the State of California, the Assembly*  
38 *thereof concurring*, That the Legislature hereby designates the  
39 overpass on Interstate 5 at the interchange of Interstate 5 and State

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

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