

Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 139

RESOLUTION CHAPTER 180

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

[Filed with Secretary of State September 9, 2016.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SCR 139, 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.

WHEREAS, Merle Ronald Haggard was born to James and Flossie Haggard on April 6, 1937, in Oildale, just north of Bakersfield, California. Merle's father was a railroad worker, and Merle grew up during the Great Depression. He lived with his family in a boxcar that they had converted into a home. As a child, Merle suffered from a respiratory condition that frequently kept him out of school and confined to bed rest; and

WHEREAS, James Haggard died from a brain tumor when Merle was nine years of age. After his father's death, Merle became rebellious. In an attempt to straighten her son out, his mother put him in several juvenile detention centers, but it had little effect on Merle's behavior; and

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

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

WHEREAS, In 1962, Merle Haggard signed with a small label called Tally Records for which he recorded five songs, including his debut single,

“Sing a Sad Song,” which rose to No. 19 on the country music charts. In 1965, he formed his own band, The Strangers, before signing with Capitol Records, and later that year the band released its debut self-titled album. The group’s followup album, “Swinging Doors,” reached No. 1 on the country music charts the following year, and in 1967 the group’s single “I’m a Lonesome Fugitive” did the same. Later that year, Merle Haggard continued his runaway success with “Branded Man,” his first self-penned No. 1 song; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

Resolved by the Senate of the State of California, the Assembly thereof concurring, That the Legislature hereby designates the overpass on Interstate 5 at the interchange of Interstate 5 and State Highway Route 44 in the City of Redding as the Merle Haggard Memorial Overpass; and be it further

Resolved, That the Department of Transportation is requested to determine the cost of appropriate signs to be placed on Interstate 5, north and south, consistent with the signing requirements for the state highway system showing this special designation and, upon receiving donations from nonstate sources sufficient to cover the cost, to erect those signs; and be it further

Resolved, That the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies of this resolution to the Director of Transportation and to the author for appropriate distribution.