

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 221

By Naifeh

A RESOLUTION to honor the lifetime and memory of the  
Honorable Ned McWherter of Tennessee.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of our friend and former colleague, Ned McWherter, who so ably served as Speaker of the House of Representatives from 1973 to 1987 and as the 46<sup>th</sup> Governor of the State of Tennessee from 1987 until 1995; and

WHEREAS, drawn to public service with a deep desire to bring opportunity and hope to those who had neither, Ned McWherter humbly offered himself as a candidate for election to the Tennessee House of Representatives in November 1968 and won election to the first of his nine terms as a member of the General Assembly; and

WHEREAS, a member of the 86<sup>th</sup> – 94<sup>th</sup> General Assemblies from 1969 until 1987, Mr. McWherter first served the 35<sup>th</sup> Floterial District of Lake, Obion, and Weakley Counties, and later the 76<sup>th</sup> House District, comprised of Weakley and Henry Counties; and

WHEREAS, quickly earning the respect of his peers, Mr. McWherter was elected chair of the House Democratic Caucus and served as chair of the Calendar and Rules Committee and as a member of the Finance, Ways and Means Committee and the General Welfare Committee; and

WHEREAS, the son of a sharecropper who rose to become the Governor of the State of Tennessee, Ned Ray McWherter was born on October 15, 1930, in Palmersville, Tennessee, to Lucille Golden Smith and Harmon Ray McWherter; and

WHEREAS, growing up during the Great Depression, young Ned attended a one-room school with a wood-burning stove and bussed tables for his family's restaurant before beginning his working career as a traveling shoe salesman from the trunk of his car; and

WHEREAS, an industrious young man with a keen mind for business, Ned McWherter started a trucking company which proved to be highly successful and allowed him to expand his

business endeavors into an Anheuser-Busch beer distributorship for Northwest Tennessee, all of which led to his financial success; and

WHEREAS, a proud American who sought to do his duty, Ned McWherter served with distinction as a member of the Tennessee National Guard for twenty-one years, from 1948 to 1969, and retired with the rank of Captain; and

WHEREAS, Mr. McWherter's first endeavor in politics was as a driver and informal aide to Congressman Robert "Fats" Everett, hearing first-hand the opinions of his fellow citizens as they expressed their views on the issues important to their families and their communities; and

WHEREAS, seeking to make the Legislature an equal partner with the Governor in the development of laws and policies to improve the quality of life for all Tennesseans, Ned McWherter was elected Speaker of the House of Representatives in 1973 and would go on to serve in that capacity for a then record seven terms; and

WHEREAS, laying the foundation for a generation of progress in Tennessee, Speaker Ned McWherter used his position to redefine the role and process of Tennessee's legislative branch of government and won acclaim for his wisdom and keen insight that resolved tough issues, not in the best interest of a few, but in the best interest of all Tennesseans; and

WHEREAS, a pioneer of open government, fiscal accountability, and equality, Mr. McWherter authored Tennessee's campaign financial disclosure law, helped pass the original "Sunshine Law" to open all government meetings and records, established new fiscal policies on state bonds and pension fund oversight, and appointed the first African-American committee chairman in the South; and

WHEREAS, never afraid to take action on an issue regardless of party politics, Speaker McWherter led the effort to build a medical school in Johnson City at East Tennessee State University over the objections of Republican Governor Winfield Dunn and later joined with Senate Speaker John Wilder to remove Democratic Governor Ray Blanton three days before the end of his term amid a scandal over prison pardons and install Republican Governor Lamar Alexander; and

WHEREAS, Speaker McWherter rendered sterling service on the State Building Commission, the Joint Fiscal Review Committee, the Council on Pensions and Retirement, the

Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial Development Commission, and the State Agri-Industries Board; and

WHEREAS, a past-chairman of the Southern States Speakers' Conference, Ned McWherter was a member of the board of governors of the Council of State Governments and the executive committee of the Southern Legislative Conference during his tenure as Speaker of the Tennessee House of Representatives; and

WHEREAS, in 1986, Ned McWherter of Weakley County was elected to the office of Governor of the State of Tennessee with the simple message that Tennessee's economic future depended on every community having access to good schools, good roads, and affordable health care; and

WHEREAS, after his trademark four vanilla wafers and a cup of coffee, Governor Ned McWherter went to work for the people of Tennessee and regained control of the state prison system that had been taken over by the federal court, and passed legislation to create new standards for the state's nursing homes and civil penalties for serious violations; and

WHEREAS, addressing the rampant double-digit unemployment that nearly half of Tennessee's counties were suffering, Governor McWherter proposed a 95-County Jobs Plan that was a reflection of his belief that Tennessee's economic growth needed to be distributed beyond the state's metropolitan centers; and

WHEREAS, over his two terms that plan shaped most of his administration's major policy initiatives – including education, roads, health care and waste management – in an effort to attract jobs and reduce chronic unemployment by increasing road construction in rural areas and link rural communities to the interstate system; and

WHEREAS, through his leadership in his second term, Governor McWherter saw Tennessee enact and fund one of the nation's most comprehensive programs of education reform, including greater flexibility for local communities, higher standards for students, tougher accountability for the public, and a new funding formula that for the first time provided every Tennessee school with the resources needed for a quality education; and

WHEREAS, he concluded his tenure as Governor by leaving his successor the strongest economy in the State's history, with Tennessee's economic growth ranked among the nation's highest as *City and State* magazine twice named Tennessee as the best managed state

government and with Governor McWherter being recognized as the nation's most outstanding governor by *Governing* magazine in 1994; and

WHEREAS, retiring from public service in 1995, Governor McWherter served as a close advisor to then President Bill Clinton, much like he had to President Jimmy Carter in the 1970s, and was often called upon for his guidance and input as a much admired patriarch and pillar of the Democratic Party by candidates for office across the Nation; and

WHEREAS, lending his time and talent to numerous civic and charitable organizations during his lifetime, Governor Ned McWherter aided the Weakley County Head Start Program, the Northwest Tennessee Economic Development District, Tennessee Heart Association, Weakley County Chamber of Commerce, Tennessee-Arkansas-Mississippi Girl Scout Council and the Tennessee Easter Seal Program-Western Region to name but a few; and

WHEREAS, Governor McWherter was a charter member of the Dresden Lions Club and the Dresden Jaycees and was also a respected member of the Free and Accepted Masons, 32<sup>nd</sup> Degree, Scottish Rite; the Order of the Mystic Shrine; Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks and the Fraternal Order of Eagles; and

WHEREAS, Governor McWherter is survived by his son and daughter-in-law, Michael Ray McWherter and Mary Jane Wooten McWherter; two grandchildren, Walker Ray McWherter and Mary Bess McWherter; a stepdaughter, Linda Ramsey; two step-grandchildren, Matthew Ramsey and Brett Ramsey; and a step-great-granddaughter, Eliana Ramsey, along with a vast multitude of dear friends, former colleagues, and admirers across Tennessee and this great nation; and

WHEREAS, Ned Ray McWherter leaves behind an indelible legacy of integrity and probity in public life, compassion and loyalty in private life, and diligence and dedication in all his chosen endeavors; and

WHEREAS, a true man of the people, Governor McWherter was a thoughtful and conscientious gentleman who loved Tennessee and took great pride in making his State a better place for all; his unmatched record in public service stands as a monument to a life well lived; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting that this General Assembly should pause to remember the extraordinary life of the sharecropper's son from Weakley County, Governor Ned McWherter of Tennessee; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED SEVENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we honor the memory of the Honorable Ned McWherter, 46<sup>th</sup> Governor of the State of Tennessee, and pay tribute to his lifetime of service to the good people of Tennessee.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we express our sympathy and offer our condolences to the family of Governor McWherter.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation to the family of Governor Ned McWherter, with this final clause omitted from such copy.