

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 671

By Gilmore

A RESOLUTION to honor Sister Sandra Smithson on the celebration of her ninetieth birthday.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that the members of this body pay tribute to those remarkable Tennesseans who are celebrating special occasions in their lives; and

WHEREAS, Sister Sandra Smithson is one such estimable individual, who will celebrate her ninetieth birthday in March 2016, a milestone that will be commemorated as yet another precious souvenir of life's rich pageant; and

WHEREAS, raised in Nashville, Sister Sandra Smithson attended Catholic schools, where she excelled in academics, sports, and peer leadership; and

WHEREAS, after graduating with honors from Xavier University, Sister Smithson was granted a teaching fellowship at Fisk University to work toward a master's degree in literature; and

WHEREAS, she soon left Fisk, finding the program to be unchallenging, and was recruited to be the first woman to host a talk show on WSOK, Nashville's first Black radio station; and

WHEREAS, in 1954, Sister Sandra Smithson answered an internal call to religious life and joined the School Sisters of St. Francis, based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and

WHEREAS, during her more than sixty years in religious life, Sister Smithson has worked in missions in the United States and Central and South America and has served as an administrator, mentor, teacher, lecturer, writer, negotiator, spiritual leader, and visionary; and

WHEREAS, as the principal of a private school in Costa Rica in the early 1960s, she initiated a pilot educational project for poor children in the surrounding barrio that led to public school reform for the entire country; and

WHEREAS, in 1992, Sister Sandra Smithson founded Project Reflect, a nonprofit organization in Nashville, whose mission is "transforming urban America through education and policy reform"; and

WHEREAS, as the executive director of Project Reflect, Sister Smithson strongly influenced passage of the first charter school legislation for the State of Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, under the new law, Project Reflect opened Middle Tennessee's first free public charter school, Smithson Craighead Academy elementary school; and

WHEREAS, today, Sister Smithson continues to work toward restructuring public education for grades K-12 in Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, she is currently focusing on literacy and vouchers, believing that parents, all of whom pay taxes through income and consumer goods, should have the right to determine which publicly funded school their children attend; and

WHEREAS, the success of the State of Tennessee, the strength of our communities, and the overall vitality of our society depend on the dedication of people like Sister Smithson who use their considerable talents and resources to ensure that all children receive the quality education to which they are entitled; and

WHEREAS, Sister Sandra Smithson is wholly committed to the noble precepts of public service that have earned Tennessee recognition as the Volunteer State, and she should be specially recognized on this very special occasion; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED NINTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we honor Sister Sandra Smithson on the celebration of her ninetieth birthday, thank her for her life's mission to educate children throughout the world, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or social and economic status, and extend our warmest wishes for continued success.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.