

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 227

By Southerland

A RESOLUTION urging the Secretary of State to include a discussion of the significance and history of the Appalachian dialect in Section VI of the *Tennessee Blue Book*.

WHEREAS, the people of the Appalachian Mountains are often misunderstood and misrepresented by society at large; the pronunciation of "Appalachia" itself is a point of dissent and sometimes condescension, with those outside of the region often saying "app-uh-lay-sha," much to the frustration of those who call "app-uh-latch-uh" their home; and

WHEREAS, the dialect of the Appalachian Mountain region is often disparaged; those unfamiliar with the region and, frequently, those living in the region believe the speech to be a corrupted version of English—the product of generations of poor education and a perpetual refusal to learn the "right" way to talk; and

WHEREAS, however, virtually every language in the world has dialects, which are varieties of the language that are particular to a group of speakers; dialects vary by region and social group, and dialect diversity reflects the fact that languages change over time and that people who live in the same area or maintain the same social identity share language norms; and

WHEREAS, many who speak what they deem "standard" American English believe that the variety of language they speak is not a dialect; however, because dialects are simply varieties of the same language, everyone speaks a dialect; and

WHEREAS, the Appalachian dialect, as is the case with its counterparts in Boston, New York, the Midwest, California, and elsewhere, is a grammatical, systematic way of speaking that contains features that harken back to the languages of the diverse individuals who inhabited the region in our country's early years; and

WHEREAS, the development of the Appalachian dialect owes much to the topography of the region; the steep, rugged terrain of the Appalachian Mountains was not hospitable to early settlers, and the tenacious individuals who made the mountains their home were then somewhat isolated from those outside the region; thus, the dialect that developed was one that is distinct and retains many features of the speech of early inhabitants; and

WHEREAS, even a shallow dive into the lexicography of the Appalachian dialect reveals these early influences: when people talk about a "pone" of cornbread, they are using a word borrowed from the Native American language Algonquian, and if they speak of having "boo coos" of something, it is easy to see the link to the French "beaucoup," meaning "many" or "much"; and

WHEREAS, the Scotch-Irish are often cited as having an influence on the language of Appalachia, and rightfully so: compound helping verbs such as "might could," the word "whenever" used as a conjunction (as in "Whenever I was young..."), and the word "need" followed by a past-tense verb (as in "The car needs washed.") can all be traced back to the speech of this group of settlers; and

WHEREAS, additionally, some grammatical components of Appalachian dialect that contain word usage that is considered by some to be incorrect is in fact systematic and, therefore, consistent and predictable: the phrases "She has tore the page" or "He has broke the glass" feature the simple past tense where other speakers might use the past participle "torn" or "broken," respectively—a hallmark of Appalachian dialect that is not simply an error but a part of the inherent grammar of the dialect; and

WHEREAS, there are untold examples of grammatical and lexicographical predecessors that have given shape to the Appalachian dialect; likewise, patterns found in Appalachian speech are systematic and just as legitimate as those found in languages throughout the world; and

WHEREAS, the influence of Appalachian speech is far-reaching; nearly two centuries ago, sons of the Appalachian region left the mountains for Texas, eventually forming a new

republic; Tennessean Davy Crockett, Virginians Stephen F. Austin and Sam Houston, and Kentuckian James Bowie were among them, and they, along with many who migrated from Appalachia to parts of Texas, had an influence on the dialect of that region that is still found today, including the term "liketa," which traveled 1,200 miles from the Appalachian Mountains to East Texas; and

WHEREAS, the dialect of the Appalachian Mountain region is a fully legitimate dialect and most deserving of the respect afforded other dialects of American English; therefore, the State of Tennessee should work to ensure that this often-disparaged dialect is appropriately represented and honored; and

WHEREAS, each year, the Secretary of State publishes the *Tennessee Blue Book*, wherein Section VI focuses on the State of Tennessee and includes "A History of Tennessee: The Land and Native People"; and

WHEREAS, given the significance of the Appalachian dialect—its connection to the culture and history of this State and its impact on the lives of many Tennesseans, both historical and living—it is fitting that the Secretary of State include a discussion of the Appalachian dialect in Section VI of the *Tennessee Blue Book*; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we hereby urge the Secretary of State to include a discussion of the significance and history of the Appalachian dialect in Section VI of the *Tennessee Blue Book*.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an enrolled copy of this resolution be transmitted to the Secretary of State.