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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 121

Offered February 23, 2026

*Celebrating the life of the Honorable Bernie Keith Day.*

Patrons—Deeds, Salim and Suetterlein; Delegates: Callsen, Cole, J.G., Cole, N.T., Hope, Laufer, McQuinn and Ware

WHEREAS, the Honorable Bernie Keith Day, an author, public servant, and compassionate community leader who was well-known for his vivid storytelling, boundless generosity, and genuine care for the well-being of others, died on May 12, 2025; and

WHEREAS, Bernie Day grew up in North Carolina and was captivated from a young age by his mother's ability to mimic entire conversations with astonishing accuracy and his uncle's dry wit and deadpan humor, experiences that shaped his oratory ability in later life; and

WHEREAS, to help support his family, Bernie Day worked at an aluminum factory while he was a student in high school; he began to cultivate his passion for activism when he learned that he was being paid more than a Black employee who had been with the factory for more than a decade and successfully convinced the foreman to give that employee a raise; and

WHEREAS, despite his own financial challenges, Bernie Day matriculated at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC); he put off buying books whenever possible and often relied on the kindness of his roommate for access to the dining hall; and

WHEREAS, Bernie Day had a longtime dream to become a novelist and began working as a journalist after graduating from UNC in 1975; he worked for a series of small newspapers in North Carolina, then served as an editor for small newspapers in Kansas City, Missouri; and

WHEREAS, Bernie Day and his high school sweetheart, Debbie, relocated in the Commonwealth and ultimately settled in Meadows of Dan in Patrick County, where he ran a general store, farmed cattle and asparagus, and was eventually hired as county administrator; during that time, he also pursued a master's degree from Duke University; and

WHEREAS, desirous to be of further service, Bernie Day ran for and was elected to a seat in the House of Delegates in 1997 and represented the residents of the 10th District until 2002; he introduced and supported numerous important pieces of legislation, earning admiration for his deep dedication to rural issues; and

WHEREAS, Bernie Day strove to build bipartisan consensus for the good of all Virginians, and was best known for his compelling oratory that combined astute commentary on legislation with good old-fashioned folksy humor and witty tales that often featured fictional characters of his own making; and

WHEREAS, after he was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, Bernie Day chose to step away from state government, but redoubled his commitment to community service and local leadership; he rallied local residents to till new gardens for seniors, offered transportation to doctor's appointments, and worked with local hunters to provide venison for food insecure families; and

WHEREAS, Bernie Day also organized fundraisers to support local fire and rescue departments and other worthy organizations, including an annual oyster roast to benefit local food banks; and

WHEREAS, in later life, Bernie Day edited a book on Virginia politics, *Notes from the Sausage Factory*, which included essays from all seven living governors at the time, leading to former Governor Gerald Baliles calling him "Virginia's country doctor of political satire"; and

WHEREAS, in 2011, Bernie Day fulfilled his lifelong dream to write a novel, releasing *The Last Pahvant*, a riveting story of an orphan growing up during the Great Depression, and was hailed as "Virginia's Mark Twain"; and

WHEREAS, Bernie Day served the Commonwealth with the utmost integrity, exemplifying a sense of rural fellowship and servant leadership rooted in kindness, compassion, and humility; and

WHEREAS, Bernie Day will be fondly remembered and greatly missed by his wife of 48 years, Debbie, and numerous other family members and friends; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby note with great sadness the loss of Bernie Keith Day, a consummate storyteller, esteemed former member of the House of Delegates, and a pillar of the community in Patrick County; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the family of Bernie Keith Day as an expression of the General Assembly's respect for his memory.

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