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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 178

Offered March 5, 2026

Commending Ernest Eugene Copenhaver, Jr.

Patron—Pillion

WHEREAS, Ernest Eugene Copenhaver, Jr., a fifth-generation cattle producer from Meadowview in Washington County, was installed in 2026 as president of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, the oldest and largest organization representing cattle farmers and ranchers in the United States; and

WHEREAS, Eugene "Gene" Copenhaver was raised on his family's farm in the Lodi community, where his parents, Ernest and Alberta Copenhaver, instilled in him a deep respect for the land, a commitment to community service, and a lifelong dedication to the beef industry, modeling values of stewardship, integrity, and producer advocacy that continue to guide his leadership today; and

WHEREAS, Copenhaver Brothers Farms, Inc., was founded by Ernest Copenhaver and his brother, S. B. Copenhaver, Jr., formalizing a family farming legacy dating back to the mid-1800s and establishing a diversified operation that evolved over time to reflect changing agricultural markets and regional strengths; and

WHEREAS, with the steadfast support of his wife, Jodi, and the encouragement of their children and grandchildren, Gene Copenhaver, along with his son Will, now manages Copenhaver Brothers Farms as a stocker cattle operation focused on forage-based production, careful risk management, and long-term sustainability, exemplifying the generational resilience and adaptability of Virginia's family farms; and

WHEREAS, Gene Copenhaver earned a degree in animal science from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in 1983 and went on to devote nearly four decades to agricultural lending, working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Farm Credit, and the First Bank & Trust Company, helping farm families across multiple states access capital, manage risk, and build viable operations, all while continuing to work side by side with his own family on the farm; and

WHEREAS, Gene Copenhaver's professional experience in both production agriculture and agricultural finance shaped a practical, producer-centered leadership philosophy grounded in relationships, education, and sound planning, including a strong emphasis on succession planning and ensuring that younger generations have a pathway into agriculture; and

WHEREAS, Gene Copenhaver has long championed grassroots engagement, believing that effective agricultural policy begins at the local level, and he has remained deeply connected to Southwest Virginia's cattle community while advancing producer priorities on the state and national stage; and

WHEREAS, Gene Copenhaver's service to the beef industry includes leadership roles at every level, including past president of the Virginia Cattlemen's Association, past chair of the Virginia Cattlemen's Foundation, and extensive national service within the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, including chair and vice chair of the Policy Division, Tax and Credit Committee, and International Trade Committee, before assuming the presidency of the association; and

WHEREAS, Gene Copenhaver is the first Virginian to serve in this role, and his installation as president of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association represents both a personal milestone and a point of pride for Southwest Virginia, which highlights the Commonwealth's enduring contributions to the cattle and beef industry in the United States and the continued importance of family farms in feeding the nation; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend Ernest Eugene Copenhaver, Jr., on the occasion of his installation as president of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association for his lifetime of commitment to Virginia agriculture, grassroots producer advocacy, and the preservation of the family farm tradition in Southwest Virginia; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to Ernest Eugene Copenhaver, Jr., as an expression of the General Assembly's admiration for his accomplishments and best wishes for continued success in his national leadership on behalf of Virginia's cattle producers and America's beef industry.

INTRODUCED

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