

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 23

By Carr

A RESOLUTION relative to the recent wildfires in the Smoky Mountains.

WHEREAS, on November 23, 2016, a fire started at a one-and-one-half-acre site on the Chimney Tops trail in Great Smoky Mountains National Park; and

WHEREAS, five days later, on November 28, a perfect storm of circumstances, including drought-like conditions, strong, gusty winds, and low humidity, combined to ignite the blaze into a firestorm of historic proportions; and

WHEREAS, wildfires burned more than 17,000 acres and damaged or destroyed some 2,460 structures, as the path of destruction quickly spread from the park to the City of Gatlinburg; fourteen people lost their lives, while another 14,000 were evacuated; and

WHEREAS, over 200 firefighters from multiple agencies bravely battled the wildfires, their efforts hindered by hurricane-force winds and the rocky terrain; other emergency responses were hindered by widespread power outages and the destruction of cell towers by fire; and

WHEREAS, the first estimate of the damages caused by the wildfires is \$500 million, an amount that will surely increase; more than \$7.6 million was spent on firefighting efforts; and

WHEREAS, as the good people of Sevier County, Gatlinburg, and Pigeon Forge begin to recover from this catastrophe and rebuild their homes and their lives, they are overflowing with gratitude for the many professional and volunteer fire, emergency, and medical personnel who risked their lives to prevent further damage and save the lives of those in danger; and

WHEREAS, they are also grateful for and overwhelmed by the humanitarian efforts of the many businesses, charitable and civic organizations, government agencies, and individuals

who responded promptly and gave generously of their resources to help the good people of Sevier County in their time of dire need; and

WHEREAS, Sevier County's own Dolly Parton ensured her continuing legacy as a true daughter of Tennessee by sponsoring and hosting the Smoky Mountain Rise telethon to provide assistance to her people during this disaster; the event raised \$9 million for the My People Fund, which will provide monetary aid to more than 1,300 families displaced from their homes by the wildfires; and

WHEREAS, the Sevier County Community Fund (SCCF), an affiliate fund of the East Tennessee Foundation, is also playing an important role by raising awareness about and providing timely assistance to their friends and neighbors whose lives have been adversely affected by the wildfires; and

WHEREAS, the proceeds from the Mountain Tough Benefit concert in Gatlinburg on December 17 and the Fire on the Mountain Bluegrass Jam in Pigeon Forge on December 23 helped fund the SCCF's worthy humanitarian efforts; and

WHEREAS, in cooperation with area businesses and leaders, the SCCF has produced the MountainTough.org website, a resource for those suffering from the aftermath of the wildfires and for those wishing to help; and

WHEREAS, it has been said that the human race is at its best when circumstances are at their worst; this adage is proven by the generous and compassionate manner in which the citizens of this great nation opened their hearts to the people of Sevier County with emergency and medical assistance, moral and financial support, and most importantly, love and understanding, during the recent wildfire disaster in East Tennessee; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED TENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that the members of this body commend and offer our appreciation and most sincere thanks to all the first responders, firefighters, healthcare personnel, law enforcement officers, missionary groups and churches, animal rescue groups, local, state, and federal agencies in the district, and the corporations, individuals, businesses, organizations, and

agencies who provided professional assistance or humanitarian aid to the citizens of Sevier County, especially the Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge communities, during the recent wildfires that raged through the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the surrounding area.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we commend and thank the Dolly Parton Foundation and the Sevier County Community Fund of the East Tennessee Foundation for their philanthropic work in assisting citizens displaced from their homes or otherwise adversely affected by the wildfires.

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