

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 24

By Lamberth

A RESOLUTION to honor James K. Polk and commemorate the placement of his tomb on the capitol grounds.

WHEREAS, President James K. Polk was initially interred in a temporary grave at the Nashville City Cemetery on June 16, 1849, as the result of his death at age fifty-three from a highly infectious disease, cholera, and in adherence to laws meant to prevent infectious diseases spreading from corpses; and

WHEREAS, eleven months later, President Polk was reinterred at his downtown Nashville mansion, "Polk Place," upon the completion of a Greek Revival tomb designed by renowned architect William Strickland, the architect of the Tennessee State Capitol and several other nationally significant buildings. President Polk's widow, First Lady Sarah Childress Polk, remained at Polk Place until her death at age eighty-seven and was interred alongside President Polk in 1891; and

WHEREAS, two years later, in 1893, after President Polk's heirs sold Polk Place, the Tennessee General Assembly adopted Joint Resolution 63, giving President Polk's heirs permission to transfer the monument and remains of President Polk and First Lady Sarah Childress Polk to the grounds of the Tennessee State Capitol, and established a committee composed of the governor, secretary of state, comptroller of the treasury, and treasurer to designate a suitable location on the Capitol grounds to place the remains and erect the monument; and

WHEREAS, subsequent to the committee's findings, President and First Lady Polk's remains and the monument were relocated to the grounds of the Tennessee State Capitol in 1893, where they remain interred today; and

WHEREAS, in 2017, a new proposal to relocate the graves of President and First Lady Polk, along with the monument, from Nashville to Columbia was introduced in the Tennessee General Assembly. The proposal sparked a lively national debate about President Polk's burial site and tomb, as well as the general sanctity of presidential sites and graves and the ownership of the remains of public figures. The debate drew national attention, leading *The New York Times* to publish the article, "President James K. Polk's Body May Be Moved. Again.", and the *Washington Post* to refer to President Polk as "the dead president who never rests in peace"; and

WHEREAS, E. Patrick McIntyre, Executive Director of the Tennessee Historical Commission, condemned efforts to move the remains of President and First Lady Polk, saying the move would "create a false sense of history"; and

WHEREAS, the grounds of the Capitol connect the Polks to Nashville, the city that they called home, where President Polk served as governor and Mrs. Polk as First Lady from 1839 to 1841 and where the First Lady raised her niece as her own daughter and remained after President Polk's death for forty-two years; and

WHEREAS, although President Polk's will stipulated that he and the First Lady be interred at Polk Place, after Polk Place was sold and demolished, the Capitol grounds remain the most suitable alternative for their interment and recognition, as the Capitol grounds are protected from development and located across the street from the Polk Place site; and

WHEREAS, the Polk monument and gravesite on the Capitol grounds was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1970 and designated a national historic landmark in 1971; and

WHEREAS, for nearly 130 years, the grounds of the Tennessee State Capitol have guarded the final resting place of President and First Lady Polk, and the historic monument and their gravesite should remain undisturbed on the Capitol grounds in remembrance of the

President and First Lady and their accomplishments, where Tennesseans and persons from around the country and world may come to honor their lives and service to Tennessee and to the United States; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we hereby honor and celebrate the life of James K. Polk for his outstanding service to the State of Tennessee and to the United States and acknowledge the grounds of the Tennessee State Capitol as the most appropriate resting place for President and First Lady Polk to ensure their continued appreciation by the public.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy and upon proper request made to the appropriate clerk, the language appearing immediately following the State seal appear without House or Senate designation.