

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 8009

By Gillespie

A RESOLUTION to honor the life and memory of Representative Jim Coley of Bartlett.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of our former colleague Representative Jim Coley of Bartlett, whose lifetime of distinguished public service improved the quality of life for every Tennessean; and

WHEREAS, a highly influential figure in the political, social, and civic life of Shelby County, Jim Coley served his constituents in numerous capacities, always working diligently at his elected duties and expending the necessary effort to understand the opposing sides of complex issues; and

WHEREAS, Representative Coley distinguished himself as a public-spirited citizen of the highest order and as an exceptional asset to the good people of the 97th House District, whom he served as a member of the 105th, 106th, 107th, 108th, 109th, 110th, and 111th General Assemblies; and

WHEREAS, long before his election to public office, Jim Coley made history for being the first eighteen-to-twenty-year old to register to vote after the passage of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which lowered the voting age from twenty-one to eighteen; and

WHEREAS, Jim Coley was a proud graduate of Messick High School, which is known, in part, for the many successful Memphis musicians who attended the school; Representative Coley was committed to preserving the history of this storied Memphis school; and

WHEREAS, Representative Coley obtained his Bachelor of Arts degree at Memphis State University and earned his Master of Arts degree in Teaching from the University of Memphis; and

WHEREAS, a retired teacher in Memphis City Schools and Shelby County Schools, Representative Jim Coley was an ardent supporter of public education, who was wholly committed to the highest tenets of quality education for all; he served with distinction as a teacher of civics, history, U.S. government, and economics at Bolton High School, Bartlett High School, and for ten years at Hamilton High School; and

WHEREAS, a talented and compassionate educator, Representative Coley worked assiduously to motivate his students to reach their full potential, both as scholars and as citizens; indeed, one of Jim Coley's former students was inspired to become a teacher because of him, and that teacher was later named Tennessee Teacher of the Year; and

WHEREAS, he was also an adjunct professor at his beloved alma mater, the University of Memphis, teaching modern political thought and U.S. government; and

WHEREAS, Jim Coley was a co-founder of Friends of the Orpheum as well as the Orpheum's longtime theater manager; well before his election to public office, he was responsible for securing funding from the General Assembly to restore the Orpheum to its former grandeur; and

WHEREAS, an active and dynamic participant in the legislative process during his time in the General Assembly, Representative Coley became known for his efforts in helping the State improve its rating in addressing domestic violence and human trafficking by sponsoring numerous bills on both issues, including the establishment of the Human Trafficking Advisory Council; and

WHEREAS, earlier this year, the General Assembly passed the Jim Coley Protection for Rape Survivors Act; the law allows victims to track sexual assault kits and extends the shelf life of those kits from three to ten years; and

WHEREAS, Representative Jim Coley estimably served as chair of the House Higher Education Subcommittee, the House Civil Justice Subcommittee, and the General

Subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee and member of the House Consumer and Human Resources Committee, the House Civil Justice Committee, the House Education Administration and Planning Committee, the House Finance, Ways and Means Committee, the House Criminal Justice Committee, the House Education Committee, the House Judiciary Committee, the House Ethics Committee, the House State and Local Government Committee, the House Employee Affairs Subcommittee, the House Finance, Ways and Means Subcommittee, the House Civil Practice Subcommittee, the House State Government Subcommittee, the House Special Initiatives Subcommittee, and the Joint Fiscal Review Committee; and

WHEREAS, he also served as a member of the Legislative Arts Caucus, the Shelby County Delegation, and the Bartlett/Northeast Republican Club, and he was a sponsor of Memphis Bridges and a member of the Shelby County Education Association and the Exchange Club; and

WHEREAS, no stranger to awards and accolades, Jim Coley was a recipient of both the Lincoln Award and the Grassroots Award from the Shelby County Republican Party, a two-time Rotarian nominee for Teacher of the Year, and the recipient of a Fulbright-Hays Study Abroad Grant; and

WHEREAS, his many accomplishments aside, perhaps Jim Coley's most important role and joy came from watching his children, Erin and Evan, grow from infancy to adulthood; his children cherish the memories of his telling bedtime stories, into which he inserted them along with Bilbo Baggins, coaching soccer, practicing baseball, making great cheeseburgers, and most importantly, instilling in them a love of lifelong learning; and

WHEREAS, Representative Jim Coley was a selfless advocate for others and always remembered his friends; he was truly a champion to those in need and found many ways to help his community; and

WHEREAS, he valued diversity and experienced life to the fullest through his love of travel, history, stories, and learning from cultures around the world; and

WHEREAS, Jim Coley leaves behind his immediate family, Paula Bittle Coley, Erin Emily Coley, Evan Andrew Coley, and Tera Bradley; his two grandsons, Owen and Merritt; many members of the Bittle and Edwards families; and those privileged to be considered family and called aunt or uncle; and

WHEREAS, he was preceded in death by his parents, Wilma Josephine (Edwards) Coley and James Monroe Coley, Sr.; and

WHEREAS, throughout his outstanding career as a public servant, Representative Jim Coley worked tirelessly on behalf of his constituents, bringing to his office an honorable bearing and the traditional values of hard work and common sense; and

WHEREAS, Jim Coley leaves behind an indelible legacy of integrity and probity in public life, compassion and loyalty in private life, and diligence and dedication in all his chosen endeavors; and

WHEREAS, a beloved son of Tennessee who took great pride in making his community and State a better place for all, it is fitting that this General Assembly should pause to remember the extraordinary life of Representative Jim Coley; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we honor the memory of Representative Jim Coley of Bartlett, reflecting fondly upon his years of admirable service to the people of Tennessee, and his stalwart commitment to living the examined life with courage and conviction.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we express our sympathy and offer our condolences to the family of Representative Coley.

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.