

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 532

By Haile

A RESOLUTION to recognize Jean Shepard on her illustrious career in country music and honor her on her fifty-ninth anniversary as a member of the Grand Ole Opry.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that this General Assembly should recognize those gifted artists who have experienced great success in the world of country music; and

WHEREAS, Jean Shepard is a legend in the world of country music and has influenced generations of country musicians; and

WHEREAS, Ollie Imogene Shepard, better known to her fans as Jean Shepard, was born on November 21, 1933; she was one of ten children born to parents Hoit and Alla Mae Shepard, who raised their family in rural Oklahoma before relocating to Visalia, California at the conclusion of World War II; and

WHEREAS, Jean Shepard learned to sing at a young age by listening to Jimmie Rodgers records on the family's wind-up Victrola; she would save pennies all year long in order to buy a new Jimmie Rodgers record each year; she was also an avid listener of the Grand Ole Opry and the Bob Wills' Tulsa radio broadcasts; and

WHEREAS, in 1948 at the age of fourteen, she and several of her friends started an all-female western swing band, calling themselves the Melody Ranch Girls; Jean sang and played the upright bass, which was impressive for a person with a stature of five feet, one inch; and

WHEREAS, Jean's immense talent and love for music impressed her parents so greatly that they made many sacrifices to facilitate their daughter's dream of becoming a country music star; they had so much faith in Jean's ability that they hocked every piece of furniture in their home in order to buy Jean her own stand-up bass which cost a staggering \$350; and

WHEREAS, Jean Shepard was a remarkable radio performer who was discovered by singer Hank Thompson on a San Joaquin Valley, California broadcast; he was so impressed by her that he recommended her to Capitol Records; and

WHEREAS, in 1952 at the age of nineteen, Jean Shepard signed her first recording contract with Capitol Records and recorded her first single, "Crying Steel Guitar Waltz"; and

WHEREAS, in 1953 Jean released her first hit single, "A Dear John Letter," a duet with Ferlin Husky about the Korean War; it was a number one hit on the country charts, remaining at the top of the charts for twenty-three weeks; the song crossed musical genres and also became a pop hit on the Billboard charts; the record sold almost four million copies, making both singers instant stars; and

WHEREAS, Jean and Ferlin followed up the success of "A Dear John Letter" with its sequel, "Forgive Me John," which also had success on the country and pop charts; following these two major hits, the two began touring together across the country; and

WHEREAS, in 1955, Jean recorded her first studio album, "Songs of a Love Affair," acting as both singer and songwriter for the record; the record proved to be her first solo success with top ten singles, "A Satisfied Mind," " Beautiful Lies," "I Thought of You," and her number thirteen hit, "Take Possession"; and

WHEREAS, her success as singer and songwriter on her solo album, "Songs of a Love Affair," led to one of the most important invitations a country music artist can receive; Jean Shepard was invited to become a member of the world famous Grand Ole Opry; and

WHEREAS, on November 21, 1955, her twenty-first birthday, Jean Shepard became a member of the Grand Ole Opry; she joined Kitty Wells and Minnie Pearl as the first females to be invited to join the Grand Ole Opry; and

WHEREAS, in 1955, Jean joined ABC-TV's nationally-televised show, "Ozark Jubilee," with Red Foley; she remained a part of the cast until 1957; and

WHEREAS, in 1959, Jean Shepard was honored by Cash Box as the Top Female Singer of the year; and

WHEREAS, in 1960 Jean married fellow Opry member Hawkshaw Hawkins, who she met on the show "Ozark Jubilee"; regretfully, their marriage only lasted for three years before her beloved husband passed away in a plane crash near Camden, Tennessee, that also claimed the lives of country musicians, Randy Hughes, Patsy Cline, and Cowboy Copas; the couple had two sons, Don and Harold, the latter of whom was born one month after his father's death, and is Hawkins' namesake; and

WHEREAS, Jean Shepard returned to the music charts in 1964 with her Top Ten hit, "Second Fiddle To an Old Guitar," which triggered a string of hits for the singer; between 1965 and 1970 she produced fifteen Top 40 hits, including "I'll Take the Dog" 1966, "If Teardrops Were Silver" 1966, and "Then He Touched Me" 1970; and

WHEREAS, in 1968, Ms. Shepard joined fellow country musician Benny Birchfield in holy matrimony; the couple has been married for forty-five joyous years and currently reside in Hendersonville, Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, Jean was a pioneer for women in country music, opening doors and knocking down barriers that paved the way for today's women of country music; and

WHEREAS, in the early 1970's she was chosen to serve as the President of the Association of Country Entertainers; and

WHEREAS, in 1973, after twenty-one years with the label, Jean left Capitol Records and signed a contract with United Artists Records; under her new label she produced the biggest hit record of her career, "Slippin' Away," written by acclaimed singer/songwriter Bill Anderson; and

WHEREAS, in 1981, she released her latest studio album, which included the song "Two Many Rivers" and remakes of her hits "A Dear John Letter" and "Slippin' Away"; and

WHEREAS, in 2010 Jean Shepard was inducted into the Oklahoma Country Music Hall of Fame, and in 2011 she was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame; and

WHEREAS, in 2014 Ms. Shepard will celebrate her fifty-ninth year as a member of the Grand Ole Opry, of which she is now the longest standing member; Jean is affectionately known by her peers and fans as "The Grand Lady of the Grand Ole Opry"; and

WHEREAS, Jean continues to perform at the Grand Ole Opry, in addition to touring with her band "The Second Fiddles"; and

WHEREAS, between 1953 and 1981, Jean Shepard recorded seventy-eight singles and forty-five albums; she was the first female in country music to sell a million records; and

WHEREAS, Jean Shepard is a country music legend that has produced a large body of work that has proved to be as enduring as her voice is pure country; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we hereby recognize and honor Jean Shepard on her illustrious career in country music and congratulate her on her fifty-ninth anniversary as a member of the Grand Ole Opry.

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