

By: Menéndez, et al.

S.R. No. 222

R E S O L U T I O N

1 WHEREAS, Former state senator and representative Joe J.
2 Bernal of San Antonio passed away on January 25, 2025, at the age of
3 97, bringing a great loss to his family, his friends, and his
4 community; and

5 WHEREAS, The son of Jose and Antonia Bernal, Joe Bernal was
6 born in San Antonio on March 1, 1927, and he grew up with the
7 companionship of eight siblings; after graduating from Lanier High
8 School in 1944, he joined the U.S. Army and served with the
9 Headquarters Squadron, Pacific Air Command, in Manila and Tokyo
10 during World War II; he attained the rank of sergeant before
11 receiving his honorable discharge at the age of 19; and

12 WHEREAS, Mr. Bernal earned a bachelor's degree in sociology
13 from Trinity University, and he began his career as an educator with
14 the Kosciusko Independent School District; he went on to teach at
15 elementary schools in Edgewood ISD and San Antonio ISD and to obtain
16 a master's degree in education with a minor in social work from Our
17 Lady of the Lake College; along the way, he was employed as a social
18 worker at the Inman Christian Center for several years; he later
19 received a doctorate in cultural foundations in education from The
20 University of Texas at Austin; and

21 WHEREAS, A passionate advocate for education and civil
22 rights, Mr. Bernal successfully ran for a seat in the Texas House of
23 Representatives in 1964; he was subsequently elected state senator
24 by the people of Bexar County and began the first of two consecutive

1 terms in the Texas Senate in January 1967; over the course of his
2 tenure as a legislator, he championed bilingual education and the
3 end of de jure segregation, and in 1969, he overcame fierce
4 opposition to secure passage of the state's first bilingual
5 education act; he also played an instrumental role in establishing
6 UT San Antonio and the UT Health Science Center, and he helped to
7 build a strong foundation for early childhood education in Texas;
8 among numerous committee assignments, he served as chair of the
9 Senate Committees on Poverty in Texas, Claims, and Federal Programs
10 and Relations; he further distinguished himself as the first
11 executive director of the Mexican American Legislative Caucus; and

12 WHEREAS, While carrying out his duties as a lawmaker, Senator
13 Bernal was employed as executive director for the Guadalupe
14 Community Center and then for the Commission for Mexican American
15 Affairs; an avid supporter of the Mexican American Legal Defense
16 and Educational Fund, he became a founding member of the
17 organization's board in 1968, holding that role for 10 years; in
18 1971, he served as the lead plaintiff in *White v. Regester*, a
19 successful challenge to Texas' 1970 congressional redistricting
20 plans; and

21 WHEREAS, After concluding his service in the Texas
22 Legislature in 1973, Senator Bernal became an educational
23 researcher for the Intercultural Development Research Association
24 as well as a regional director for ACTION, a federal agency that
25 coordinated volunteer opportunities; beginning in 1982, he served
26 as principal of Emma Frey Elementary School in Edgewood ISD for five
27 years, and he subsequently accepted a position as assistant

1 superintendent for instructional services in Harlandale ISD; and

2 WHEREAS, Senator Bernal was elected to the State Board of
3 Education in 1996, and over the next decade, he continued his
4 efforts to advocate for bilingual education; he worked tirelessly
5 to provide classrooms with Spanish-language textbooks and to have
6 the elementary curriculum translated into Spanish, and he supported
7 the addition of mariachi band competitions to the University
8 Interscholastic League; twice reelected to the board, he served as
9 its vice chair from 2001 to 2003 and chaired the committee on
10 instruction; and

11 WHEREAS, Among his many accolades, Senator Bernal was
12 recognized with the Inspire Award from the SAISD Foundation in
13 2013, and he and his wife, fellow educator Mary Esther Bernal,
14 received the Lifetime Achievement Award from MALDEF in 2009; in
15 2014, Northside ISD named Bernal Middle School in his honor; and

16 WHEREAS, Above all else, Senator Bernal was devoted to his
17 family; he and his wife shared a rewarding marriage of six and a
18 half decades before her passing, and he took great pride in their
19 four children, Richard, Patrick, Rebecca, and the late Barney
20 Bernal; over the years, he was further blessed with eight
21 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren; and

22 WHEREAS, Joe Bernal made a lasting, positive difference in
23 the lives of countless Texans through his exceptional contributions
24 as a public servant, and those who were fortunate enough to know him
25 will forever treasure their memories of his generosity, his
26 strength of character, and his love for his family and community;
27 now, therefore, be it

S.R. No. 222

1 RESOLVED, That the Senate of the 89th Texas Legislature
2 hereby pay tribute to the life of the Honorable Joe J. Bernal and
3 extend heartfelt sympathy to his relatives and many friends; and,
4 be it further

5 RESOLVED, That an official copy of this resolution be
6 prepared for his family and that when the Texas Senate adjourns this
7 day, it do so in memory of Joe Bernal.