

By: Cohen

H.R. No. 750

R E S O L U T I O N

1 WHEREAS, Family and friends are mourning the loss of John
2 Paul Barnich of Houston, who died on February 2, 2009, at the age of
3 63; and

4 WHEREAS, John Barnich was born to Aileen and Bill Barnich,
5 Jr., of Cheboygan, Michigan, on September 25, 1945, and grew up on
6 nearby Mullett Lake; he earned a bachelor's degree in psychology
7 from Michigan State University in 1968; and

8 WHEREAS, After moving to Houston in 1969, Mr. Barnich taught
9 for 10 years in the Houston Independent School District; he was a
10 gifted and energetic teacher, designing a psychology program for
11 the district and working with the Federal Bureau of Investigation
12 to create a pilot program in police administration, which grew into
13 the HISD High School for Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice; and

14 WHEREAS, Mr. Barnich was a student council sponsor and a
15 building steward for the Houston Federation of Teachers; he was
16 recognized by Waltrip High School in 1973 as an Outstanding Young
17 Educator, and in 1978, he earned a Teacher of the Year Achievement
18 Award; and

19 WHEREAS, In 1977, Mr. Barnich spent six months in India
20 studying comparative religion as a Fulbright scholar; returning to
21 Texas, he earned his law degree from South Texas College of Law in
22 1980, and he opened his practice in 1981; he worked for Houston
23 Volunteer Lawyers and was a founder of the Bar Association for Human
24 Rights; he also lectured on the law for Thurgood Marshall School of

1 Law, Texas Southern University, the Texas Human Rights Foundation,
2 and the Houston Bar Association; and

3 WHEREAS, Mr. Barnich was a pioneering activist on behalf of
4 the rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people; he
5 took on much pro bono work on behalf of the GLBT community, and one
6 of his cases was joined by the U.S. Department of Justice and
7 resulted in people with AIDS being included in the Americans with
8 Disabilities Act; in another case, he effected an important change
9 in the way dentists treat people with AIDS; and

10 WHEREAS, A cofounder of AIDS Foundation Houston, Mr. Barnich
11 served as chair of the organization's board from 1990 to 1994;
12 during his tenure, he helped obtain a major community development
13 grant for AIDS housing, and developed a grant for AIDS education in
14 the county Juvenile Detention Center; he also served on the board of
15 the AIDS Equity League from 1988 to 1992 and played an active role
16 in the Houston GLBT Political Caucus; and

17 WHEREAS, In 1999, Mr. Barnich was appointed to be Houston's
18 first openly gay municipal judge, and he served with distinction in
19 that post until 2007; he continued to serve as a part-time
20 adjudication hearing officer until his death; and

21 WHEREAS, For his efforts in behalf of equality and social
22 justice, Mr. Barnich was named the Texas Human Rights Foundation
23 Advocate of the Year in 1992, and two years later, he earned the
24 Humanitarian Award from the Conference on AIDS in America; he was
25 also recognized with the Houston Humanitarian Award and the
26 Humanitarian Award from the GLBT Political Caucus; and

27 WHEREAS, Mr. Barnich possessed a ready wit; when he was asked

1 how being gay would make him different from other municipal judges,
2 he quipped that he would upgrade the courtroom sound system to play
3 show tunes; a sign on his office door read, "Be nice or leave"; and

4 WHEREAS, An outspoken champion for the causes he believed in,
5 John Barnich worked tirelessly to improve the lives of others, and
6 his legacy will long resonate in the community that he loved; now,
7 therefore, be it

8 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives of the 81st Texas
9 Legislature hereby pay tribute to the life of the Honorable John
10 Paul Barnich and extend sincere condolences to the members of his
11 family: to his brothers, Rick Barnich and Bill Barnich III; to his
12 sisters, Mary Barnich and Martha Jo Vanderberg; and to his other
13 relatives and many friends; and, be it further

14 RESOLVED, That an official copy of this resolution be
15 prepared for his family and that when the Texas House of
16 Representatives adjourns this day, it do so in memory of John
17 Barnich.