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R E S O L U T I O N

1 WHEREAS, June 12, 2017, marks the 30th anniversary of
2 President Ronald Reagan's historic speech at the Berlin Wall, in
3 which he boldly challenged the Communist rulers of the Soviet Union
4 to tear down the wall and reunify East and West Berlin; and

5 WHEREAS, In one of the darkest episodes of the Cold War, the
6 Communist government of East Germany began building on August 13,
7 1961, what they called an "Antifaschistischer Schutzwall," or
8 "antifascist bulwark," across the center of the divided city of
9 Berlin; the government claimed the wall was to keep Westerners from
10 entering and undermining the Socialist state, but in reality, it
11 was intended to keep East Berlin's disillusioned residents from
12 escaping to the West; and

13 WHEREAS, A makeshift wall was completed in two weeks, but it
14 was eventually replaced by a structure of reinforced concrete, 12
15 feet tall, 4 feet wide, and topped by an enormous pipe that made it
16 almost impossible to climb over; behind the wall, East German
17 officials created a floodlit no-man's-land called the "Death
18 Strip," which was guarded by attack dogs, trip-wire machine guns,
19 and soldiers with orders to shoot on sight; and

20 WHEREAS, Over the years, many desperate East Germans tried to
21 get over, under, or around this terrifying barrier; at least 171
22 people were killed in the attempt, but somehow more than 5,000 East
23 Germans, including 600 border guards, managed to escape; these
24 brave individuals employed such extreme methods as jumping out of

1 windows next to the wall, climbing over barbed wire, crawling
2 through sewers, driving at high speed through unfortified
3 checkpoints, or even floating over the boundary in hot air
4 balloons; and

5 WHEREAS, By the 1980s, the Berlin Wall was firmly fixed in the
6 public imagination as a symbol of the failure of Communism and the
7 desperate attempt of a foundering state to imprison its own
8 citizens; the wall and the ideology it represented were roundly
9 condemned by many world leaders, including Pope John Paul II,
10 British prime minister Margaret Thatcher, Polish Solidarity leader
11 Lech Walesa, and the Czech writer and dissident Vaclav Havel, all of
12 whom denounced Communism and the abuse of fundamental human rights
13 taking place in the countries behind the Iron Curtain; and

14 WHEREAS, Towering among these champions of liberty was
15 President Ronald Reagan, who helped lead the effort to defeat
16 Communism, and in June 1987, he traveled to Germany in order to
17 speak at the Brandenburg Gate, only 100 yards from the wall itself;
18 in his preparations for this monumental event, White House
19 speechwriter Peter Robinson visited Berlin and spoke with Germans
20 whose families had been torn apart by the wall, and he was inspired
21 to include a line addressed directly to the general secretary of the
22 Soviet Union, demanding the destruction of the wall; and

23 WHEREAS, This appeal was controversial even within the Reagan
24 administration, particularly among the staff of the State
25 Department; in the final moments before the speech, as he was riding
26 in his limousine to the wall, President Reagan told his deputy chief
27 of staff Kenneth Duberstein that he was going to deliver the line

1 anyway, saying with a smile, "The boys at State are going to kill
2 me, but it's the right thing to do"; shortly thereafter, he spoke
3 before a large assembly of Germans, and the crowd roared its
4 appreciation when he reached the now-famous line, "Mr. Gorbachev,
5 tear down this wall!"; and

6 WHEREAS, A spark was lit, and only a few years later, the
7 world saw the rapid collapse of Communism, not only in Germany and
8 Eastern Europe, but eventually in the Soviet Union itself; at
9 midnight on November 9, 1989, the East German authorities finally
10 threw open the checkpoints along the wall, and millions of
11 Berliners from both sides came together in what one historian
12 called "the greatest street party in the history of the world";
13 enthusiastic Germans climbed the wall and danced on top of it or
14 attacked it with hammers and pickaxes; over the coming months, this
15 symbol of tyranny was reduced to rubble, signaling the defeat of
16 Communism and oppression and the triumph of democracy and
17 independence; and

18 WHEREAS, In the relentless march of human events, there are
19 rare moments in which a single man's eloquence and moral conviction
20 can inspire millions and embody a new spirit of liberty, and Ronald
21 Reagan's daring address in Berlin was one such moment, worthy of
22 remembrance by people around the world for as long as the love of
23 freedom endures; now, therefore, be it

24 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives of the 85th Texas
25 Legislature hereby commemorate the 30th anniversary of President
26 Reagan's speech at the Berlin Wall on June 12, 1987.