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By:  Bucy H.R. No. 1539

R E S O L U T I O N

WHEREAS, Dr. Robert Keith Pendergrass of Austin passed away on June 21, 2018, at the age of 93, leaving his loved ones to reflect on a life of meaningful accomplishments and dedicated service to his country; and

WHEREAS, The son of Lee Roy and Helena Slezinsky Pendergrass, Robert Pendergrass was born in Kingsville on September 15, 1924, and he grew up with the companionship of two siblings, William and Helen; after graduating early from Crozier Technical High School in downtown Dallas, he enrolled at Texas A&M College in 1941, at age 16; he was one of the few first-semester freshmen to be admitted to the college's Singing Cadets choral group, and he retained his passion for singing and music throughout his life; both he and his brother showcased their vocal talents as regular performers on the WRR Gospel Hour in Dallas; and

WHEREAS, On December 8, 1941, the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Mr. Pendergrass volunteered for service in the United States Army, which granted him a deferred induction until the end of the school year in 1942; assigned to the Medical Corps, he was sent to Ohio State University and the University of Michigan Medical School to complete his undergraduate and medical degrees; after completing his surgical residency at Baylor Hospital in Dallas, he reenlisted in the U.S. Air Force to assist in the Korean War effort; he served as chief of surgery for the 3555th Medical Group at Perrin Air Force Base in Sherman before being promoted to commander of the 3645th Medical Group and Hospital at Laughlin Air Force Base in Del Rio; and

WHEREAS, In 1953, Dr. Pendergrass entered private practice as a general family physician and surgeon in Pittsburg; he continued in that role until 1980, often treating patients on house calls, as had long been the practice in rural East Texas; during that time, he also served as medical director for the Medical and Surgical Hospital of Camp County and as a faculty member of the medical schools at Louisiana State and Vanderbilt Universities; he found great fulfillment in caring for local residents, and he also worked tirelessly to eradicate racial bigotry in the area; in 1964, he successfully ran for and served as president of the Pittsburg School Board to help ensure the full integration of the school system; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Pendergrass shared 67 years of marriage with his beloved wife, Mary Pendergrass; he took great pride in his four children and their spouses, Robert Keith Pendergrass and his wife, Juli, Mary Virginia Lannen and her husband, Rick, Henry Lee Pendergrass and his wife, Coleen, and Peter William Pendergrass and his wife, Desiree; with the passing years, the family grew to include nine grandchildren, Virginia, John, R. H., Anna, Sarah, Peter, Katie, Abby, and Annie, as well as three great-grandchildren; Dr. Pendergrass also welcomed into his home a Swedish exchange student, Janne Zetterqvist, who became like a son to him; and

WHEREAS, In 1981, Dr. Pendergrass and his wife moved to Austin, where he worked for the Texas Department of Human Resources as the deputy commissioner for health policy and programs and as the special assistant for health affairs; he later became the Texas state Medicaid director, as well as vice president and medical director for the National Heritage Insurance Company and a medical advisor for Electronic Data Systems; he had the distinction of being appointed by Governor Bill Clements to the Governor's Coordinating Committee to Facilitate Organ Transplants, and he was reappointed by Governor Mark White after Governor Clements left office; and

WHEREAS, Deeply proud of his Texas heritage, Dr. Pendergrass was a founding member of the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum, which gave him an outlet to share the state's rich history with friends and acquaintances who visited Austin; he and his wife were also valued members of St. David's Episcopal Church; after retiring at age 72, he taught himself Spanish and took up oil painting, completing several works for his grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Robert Pendergrass was admired and respected for his considerable gifts and accomplishments, as well as for his devotion to his family, state, and country, and he will forever remain a source of inspiration for those he leaves behind; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives of the 86th Texas Legislature hereby pay tribute to the memory of Dr. Robert Keith Pendergrass and extend sincere sympathy to his family and friends; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That an official copy of this resolution be prepared for his family and that when the Texas House of Representatives adjourns this day, it do so in memory of Dr. Pendergrass.