

By: Bailes

H.C.R. No. 47

# CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

1 WHEREAS, For more than 50 years, the Texas Prison Rodeo stood  
2 as a beloved institution known throughout the Lone Star State and  
3 beyond; and

4 WHEREAS, Established in 1931, the Texas Prison Rodeo took  
5 place annually at the Texas State Penitentiary at Huntsville, with  
6 the event traditionally being held on each Sunday in October; the  
7 rodeo was created by state prison system general manager Marshall  
8 Lee Simmons to serve as a source of income for the penitentiary and  
9 to provide entertainment for prisoners, employees, and their  
10 families, but its popularity immediately exceeded all  
11 expectations; the competition soon grew to become one of the  
12 largest sporting events in Texas and helped reveal rodeo's  
13 widespread appeal among the general public; and

14 WHEREAS, "The Wildest Show Behind Bars" was held on the  
15 baseball field outside the "Walls" Unit during its early years; in  
16 1950, a \$1 million open-air arena with a capacity of over 20,000 was  
17 constructed; the new venue was able to accommodate more people, and  
18 attendance continued to surge, totaling close to 100,000 during  
19 peak years; the profits from ticket sales helped fund education,  
20 recreation, and medical programs for inmates across Texas; and

21 WHEREAS, In the early 1950s, the rodeo began featuring  
22 celebrity entertainers during intermission; a host of legendary  
23 stars took the stage through the decades, including Johnny Cash,  
24 Willie Nelson, Loretta Lynn, Dolly Parton, and George Strait; in

1 addition, many inmates demonstrated their dancing and musical  
2 talents for the thousands of spectators who filled the venue; and

3 WHEREAS, Above all else, the prison rodeo highlighted the  
4 exceptional riding and ranching skills possessed by numerous  
5 individuals in the corrections system; vying for the "Top Hand"  
6 award, inmates from various units in Texas participated in tryouts,  
7 and between 50 and 100 of the best contestants got the chance to  
8 show their abilities in Huntsville each year; they took part in  
9 standard rodeo events, such as bull riding, horse racing, and  
10 bareback bronc riding, as well as in a number of novelty  
11 competitions; these included wild cow milking, bull dogging, and  
12 the perennial favorite, "Hard Money," in which participants tried  
13 to snatch a tobacco sack filled with cash from between the horns of  
14 a rampaging bull; the winners of these challenges were regarded  
15 with great esteem, and those who didn't qualify had other  
16 opportunities to get involved by serving as staff members or  
17 assisting in making the uniforms worn by the competitors; and

18 WHEREAS, The end of the rodeo came in the mid-1980s, after the  
19 arena was deemed structurally unsafe and it was decided that  
20 repairs were too costly to undertake; the final Texas Prison Rodeo  
21 took place on October 26, 1986, and the facility then remained empty  
22 and unused for a quarter century until being demolished in 2012; and

23 WHEREAS, From the time of its establishment during the Great  
24 Depression to its conclusion five and a half decades later, the  
25 Texas Prison Rodeo was an unforgettable chapter in the saga of the  
26 Lone Star State, and this fascinating event is indeed deserving of  
27 special recognition; now, therefore, be it

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1           RESOLVED, That the 86th Legislature of the State of Texas  
2 hereby pay tribute to the history of the Texas Prison Rodeo.