

By: Bucy

H.R. No. 1539

R E S O L U T I O N

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

5 WHEREAS, The son of Lee Roy and Helena Slezinsky Pendergrass,
6 Robert Pendergrass was born in Kingsville on September 15, 1924,
7 and he grew up with the companionship of two siblings, William and
8 Helen; after graduating early from Crozier Technical High School in
9 downtown Dallas, he enrolled at Texas A&M College in 1941, at age
10 16; he was one of the few first-semester freshmen to be admitted to
11 the college's Singing Cadets choral group, and he retained his
12 passion for singing and music throughout his life; both he and his
13 brother showcased their vocal talents as regular performers on the
14 WRR Gospel Hour in Dallas; and

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

1 3645th Medical Group and Hospital at Laughlin Air Force Base in Del
2 Rio; and

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

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

26 WHEREAS, In 1981, Dr. Pendergrass and his wife moved to
27 Austin, where he worked for the Texas Department of Human Resources

1 as the deputy commissioner for health policy and programs and as the
2 special assistant for health affairs; he later became the Texas
3 state Medicaid director, as well as vice president and medical
4 director for the National Heritage Insurance Company and a medical
5 advisor for Electronic Data Systems; he had the distinction of
6 being appointed by Governor Bill Clements to the Governor's
7 Coordinating Committee to Facilitate Organ Transplants, and he was
8 reappointed by Governor Mark White after Governor Clements left
9 office; and

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

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

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

26 RESOLVED, That an official copy of this resolution be
27 prepared for his family and that when the Texas House of

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1 Representatives adjourns this day, it do so in memory of
2 Dr. Pendergrass.