

By: Herrero

H.R. No. 41

R E S O L U T I O N

1           WHEREAS, The State of Texas lost a bold champion of social  
2 progress and stalwart enemy of corruption with the passing of  
3 former state representative Frances Tarlton "Sissy" Farenthold of  
4 Houston on September 26, 2021, at the age of 94; and

5           WHEREAS, The former Frances Tarlton was born in Corpus  
6 Christi on October 2, 1926; she was the daughter of Benjamin Dudley  
7 Tarlton Jr., a prominent attorney, and Catherine "Catty" Bluntzer  
8 Tarlton, and she was also influenced by the legacy of her paternal  
9 grandfather, who had served as a state representative and a chief  
10 justice of the Court of Civil Appeals; after attending The Hockaday  
11 School in Dallas, she earned her bachelor's degree in political  
12 science from Vassar College at the age of 19; and

13           WHEREAS, She enrolled at The University of Texas School of  
14 Law and was one of just eight women to graduate in the Class of 1949,  
15 after which she joined her father's law firm; the following year,  
16 she married George Farenthold, and the couple became the parents of  
17 five children, James, Vincent, George, Benjamin "Dudley", and  
18 Emilie; though she placed her career on hold while raising her  
19 children, she became increasingly active in the civic life of  
20 Corpus Christi in the early 1960s, serving as a member of the city's  
21 Human Relations Commission and as director of Nueces County Legal  
22 Aid and fighting to prevent the obstruction of shoreline views in  
23 the area; and

24           WHEREAS, In 1968, when Ms. Farenthold launched a successful

1 bid for a seat in the Texas House of Representatives, women  
2 candidates were rare; sworn into office at the start of the 61st  
3 Legislature the following January, she was the only woman serving  
4 in the chamber and one of just two in the entire legislature;  
5 pursuing a range of progressive measures during her two terms in  
6 office, she sought to protect the environment, advance civil  
7 rights, strengthen the social safety net, and improve public  
8 education; joining with her state senate counterpart, Barbara  
9 Jordan, she cosponsored the Texas Equal Rights Amendment and  
10 secured its passage; and

11 WHEREAS, Perhaps best known for promoting transparency and  
12 ethics reform, Representative Farenthold played a prominent role in  
13 focusing public attention on the corruption exposed by the  
14 Sharpstown scandal, which erupted in 1971; leading a group of  
15 like-minded legislators that became known as the Dirty Thirty, she  
16 demanded an investigation of the house speaker and others, and the  
17 group's efforts helped bring about a sea change in Texas politics;  
18 many of those connected to the scandal saw their political careers  
19 come to an end, and the Dirty Thirty continued to effect reforms at  
20 the State Capitol even after Representative Farenthold left office  
21 at the end of the 62nd Legislature; and

22 WHEREAS, In 1972, Ms. Farenthold ran for governor, and  
23 although she lost a runoff in the Democratic primary, she played a  
24 central role in shaping the national party's reformist platform  
25 that year; she placed second in the voting for the vice presidential  
26 candidate, besting the likes of Jimmy Carter and Ted Kennedy, and  
27 became the first woman to garner significant support for that place

1 on the ticket; the next year, she was elected as the inaugural chair  
2 of the National Women's Political Caucus; and

3 WHEREAS, Ms. Farenthold went on to serve for four years as  
4 the first female president of Wells College in Aurora, New York,  
5 which was then a women-only institution; while balancing its budget  
6 and expanding student recruitment, she cofounded the Public  
7 Leadership Education Network to encourage young women to pursue  
8 careers in public service; returning to Texas, she resumed the  
9 practice of law and joined the faculties of Texas Southern  
10 University and the University of Houston, where she taught one of  
11 the nation's first classes on gender-based discrimination; and

12 WHEREAS, Elevating her activism to the international level,  
13 Ms. Farenthold joined the board of the Helsinki Watch Committee,  
14 precursor of Human Rights Watch, led protests against apartheid in  
15 South Africa, and participated in peace, human rights, and  
16 environmental efforts around the globe; she was also chair of the  
17 Institute for Policy Studies in Washington and a member of the  
18 advisory board of the Bernard and Audre Rapoport Center for Human  
19 Rights and Justice at The University of Texas School of Law; other  
20 notable achievements included serving as chair of the interfaith  
21 Rothko Chapel in Houston for three decades and as executive  
22 producer of the 2009 documentary *Quest for Honor*; her myriad  
23 accolades include the inaugural Molly Ivins Lifetime Achievement  
24 Award from the ACLU of Texas, the Lyndon Johnson Lifetime Service  
25 Award from the Democratic Party of Texas, and the 2013 Women of  
26 Courage Award from the National Women's Political Caucus; and

27 WHEREAS, Sissy Farenthold devoted herself wholeheartedly to

1 making the world more just, peaceful, and humane, and although she  
2 is deeply missed, her vision and compassion will remain a lasting  
3 source of inspiration in the years to come; now, therefore, be it

4         RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives of the 87th Texas  
5 Legislature, 3rd Called Session, hereby pay tribute to the life of  
6 the Honorable Frances Tarlton "Sissy" Farenthold and extend sincere  
7 condolences to all who mourn her passing; and, be it further

8         RESOLVED, That an official copy of this resolution be  
9 prepared for her family and that when the Texas House of  
10 Representatives adjourns this day, it do so in memory of Sissy  
11 Farenthold.