

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 305

In Memory
of
Larry McMurry

WHEREAS, The death of acclaimed author Larry McMurry on March 25, 2021, at the age of 84, has brought a great loss to American literature and deep sorrow to his fellow Texans; and

WHEREAS, Born in Wichita Falls on June 3, 1936, Larry Jeff McMurry was the son of Hazel Ruth McIver McMurry and William Jefferson McMurry Jr.; he grew up with three siblings, Sue, Judy, and Charlie, and lived on his grandfather's ranch until his parents moved to nearby Archer City; an avid reader and indifferent horseman, he headed off to college, earning a bachelor's degree from the University of North Texas and a master's degree in English from Rice University; while completing a Stegner Fellowship at Stanford University alongside Ken Kesey and other notable writers, he also worked as a rare book scout, foreshadowing a dual career herding books and words, as he would drolly describe his *métiers*; and

WHEREAS, Mr. McMurry found acclaim with his first novel, *Horseman, Pass By*, in 1961, and it was made into a hit film, *Hud*, two years later; his sharp dialogue, finely drawn characters, and vivid depictions of a changing Texas were profoundly cinematic, and his third novel, *The Last Picture Show*, became a movie classic, with an Oscar-nominated script by Mr. McMurry and director Peter Bogdanovich; set in a fictionalized Archer City, the movie was filmed there, and many locals appeared as extras; and

WHEREAS, While beginning to make his mark in the literary world, Mr. McMurtry taught at Texas Christian University, Rice University, George Mason University, and American University; a Guggenheim fellowship allowed him time to write a seminal collection of essays about the Lone Star State, *In a Narrow Grave*; as he grew in stature, he was able to leave academia, and in 1971 he opened Booked Up to sell fine and scholarly books in Washington, D.C.; his expertise in antiquarian volumes made the shop a success, and it expanded to Houston, Dallas, Tucson, and Archer City; he continued to write prolifically, including book reviews, scripts, and magazine essays, as well as novels; *Terms of Endearment* inspired a box office smash that won the Academy Award for best picture in 1983; after his best-selling Western epic *Lonesome Dove* won a Pulitzer Prize for literature, it was transferred to the screen as a beloved television miniseries that won numerous Emmy awards; and

WHEREAS, For two years, Mr. McMurtry promoted freedom of expression as the president of PEN America, a human rights organization of the literary world; in 1991, he underwent quadruple bypass surgery, and while recovering in Tucson, Arizona, at the home of close friend Diana Ossana, he fell into the kind of depression that besets many heart patients; he managed to complete a bleak sequel to *Lonesome Dove*, *Streets of Laredo*, but his despair failed to lift until Ms. Ossana coaxed him back to his typewriter by agreeing to collaborate; they formed a productive partnership, beginning with the novel *Pretty Boy Floyd* and proceeding through dozens of other works; and

WHEREAS, With D.C. rents soaring, Mr. McMurtry decided to pursue his dream of turning Archer City into an American version of Hay-on-Wye, a British mecca for bibliophiles; he bought up commercial real estate downtown and consolidated his vast holdings in his hometown, where the man of letters could be spotted pulling a dolly full of books between the shop's

buildings; unassuming and generous, he never hesitated to quietly help local people in need; he welcomed graduate students from UNT to his store and his home to learn about writing, offering in-depth advice on every aspect of the craft; and

WHEREAS, Mr. McMurtry bought the film rights to an Annie Proulx short story, "Brokeback Mountain," and he and Ms. Ossana collaborated on the screenplay; the 2005 critically acclaimed adaptation won them an Academy Award, which allowed him to make an acceptance speech lauding booksellers as cultural stewards; disinclined to display his many accolades, he passed them along to his mother while she was alive, and the Oscar was duly dispatched to the Lonesome Dove Inn, owned by a friend; and

WHEREAS, In April 2011, with a small group of friends and family gathered at Booked Up, Mr. McMurtry married Faye Kelsey, whom he had admired since his college days; they divided their time between Arizona and Archer City, where he kept the same post office box for almost 70 years; along the way, the bookstore had grown to become one of the largest in the country, with some 400,000 volumes in six buildings; in 2012, Mr. McMurtry auctioned off much of his inventory, in order to leave a more manageable estate to his heirs, including his son from his first marriage, noted singer-songwriter James McMurtry, and his grandson, rising musician Curtis McMurtry; he published one final, sparse, deftly comedic elegy for the vanished American frontier, *The Last Kind Words Saloon*, in 2014; that year, he accepted the National Humanities Medal, bringing the *Archer County News* along to the White House for the presentation; and

WHEREAS, Larry McMurtry possessed a singular ability to distill, without sentimentality, the complexities and contradictions of the Texas spirit, enthralling millions of people with his gifts as a storyteller, and although he is sadly missed by his family and friends, his works will continue to beguile generations of readers in the years to come; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Senate of the State of Texas, 87th Legislature, hereby pay tribute to the life and legacy of Larry McMurtry; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That an official copy of this Resolution be prepared for his family and that when the Texas Senate adjourns this day, it do so in memory of Larry McMurtry.

Springer, Gutierrez

President of the Senate

I hereby certify that the above Resolution was adopted by the Senate on April 22, 2021, by a rising vote.

Secretary of the Senate

Member, Texas Senate