

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 222

In Memory
of
Joe Bernal

WHEREAS, Former state senator and representative Joe J. Bernal of San Antonio passed away on January 25, 2025, at the age of 97, bringing a great loss to his family, his friends, and his community; and

WHEREAS, The son of Jose and Antonia Bernal, Joe Bernal was born in San Antonio on March 1, 1927, and he grew up with the companionship of eight siblings; after graduating from Lanier High School in 1944, he joined the U.S. Army and served with the Headquarters Squadron, Pacific Air Command, in Manila and Tokyo during World War II; he attained the rank of sergeant before receiving his honorable discharge at the age of 19; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Bernal earned a bachelor's degree in sociology from Trinity University, and he began his career as an educator with the Kosciusko Independent School District; he went on to teach at elementary schools in Edgewood ISD and San Antonio ISD and to obtain a master's degree in education with a minor in social work from Our Lady of the Lake College; along the way, he was employed as a social worker at the Inman Christian Center for several years; he later received a doctorate in cultural foundations in education from The University of Texas at Austin; and

WHEREAS, A passionate advocate for education and civil rights, Mr. Bernal successfully ran for a seat in the Texas House of Representatives in 1964; he was subsequently elected state senator by the people of Bexar County and began the first of two consecutive terms in the Texas Senate in January 1967; over the course of his tenure as a legislator, he championed bilingual education and the end of de jure segregation, and in 1969, he overcame fierce opposition to secure passage of the state's first bilingual education act; he also played an instrumental role in establishing UT San Antonio and the UT Health Science Center, and he helped to build a strong foundation for early childhood education in Texas; among numerous committee assignments, he served as chair of the Senate Committees on Poverty in Texas, Claims, and Federal Programs and Relations; he further distinguished himself as the first executive director of the Mexican American Legislative Caucus; and

WHEREAS, While carrying out his duties as a lawmaker, Senator Bernal was employed as executive director for the Guadalupe Community Center and then for the Commission for Mexican American Affairs; an avid supporter of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, he became a founding member of the organization's board in 1968, holding that role for 10 years; in 1971, he served as the lead plaintiff in *White v. Regester*, a successful challenge to Texas' 1970 congressional redistricting plans; and

WHEREAS, After concluding his service in the Texas Legislature in 1973, Senator Bernal became an educational researcher for the Intercultural Development Research Association as well as a regional director for ACTION, a federal agency that coordinated volunteer opportunities; beginning in 1982, he served as principal of Emma Frey Elementary School in Edgewood ISD for five years, and he subsequently accepted a position as assistant superintendent for instructional services in Harlandale ISD; and

WHEREAS, Senator Bernal was elected to the State Board of Education in 1996, and over the next decade, he continued his

efforts to advocate for bilingual education; he worked tirelessly to provide classrooms with Spanish-language textbooks and to have the elementary curriculum translated into Spanish, and he supported the addition of mariachi band competitions to the University Interscholastic League; twice reelected to the board, he served as its vice chair from 2001 to 2003 and chaired the committee on instruction; and

WHEREAS, Among his many accolades, Senator Bernal was recognized with the Inspire Award from the SAISD Foundation in 2013, and he and his wife, fellow educator Mary Esther Bernal, received the Lifetime Achievement Award from MALDEF in 2009; in 2014, Northside ISD named Bernal Middle School in his honor; and

WHEREAS, Above all else, Senator Bernal was devoted to his family; he and his wife shared a rewarding marriage of six and a half decades before her passing, and he took great pride in their four children, Richard, Patrick, Rebecca, and the late Barney Bernal; over the years, he was further blessed with eight grandchildren and five great-grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, Joe Bernal made a lasting, positive difference in the lives of countless Texans through his exceptional contributions as a public servant, and those who were fortunate enough to know him will forever treasure their memories of his generosity, his strength of character, and his love for his family and community; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Senate of the State of Texas, 89th Legislature, hereby pay tribute to the life of the Honorable Joe J. Bernal and extend heartfelt sympathy to his relatives and many friends; 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 Joe Bernal.

Menéndez

Alvarado	Hagenbuch	Middleton
Bettencourt	Hall	Miles
Birdwell	Hancock	Nichols
Blanco	Hinojosa of Hidalgo	Parker
Campbell	Hinojosa of Nueces	Paxton
Cook	Huffman	Perry
Creighton	Hughes	Schwertner
Eckhardt	Johnson	Sparks
Flores	King	West
Gutierrez	Kolkhorst	Zaffirini

Patrick, President of the Senate

President of the Senate

I hereby certify that the above Resolution was adopted by the Senate on June 1, 2025, by a rising vote.

Secretary of the Senate

Member, Texas Senate