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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 173

Offered January 20, 2006

Commending the Virginia Coalition for Open Government on the occasion of its 10th anniversary.

Patrons—Houck, Bell, Blevins, Chichester, Colgan, Cuccinelli, Deeds, Devolites Davis, Edwards, Hanger, Hawkins, Howell, Lambert, Locke, Lucas, Marsh, Martin, McDougle, Miller, Newman, Norment, Obenshain, O'Brien, Potts, Puckett, Puller, Quayle, Rerras, Reynolds, Ruff, Saslaw, Stolle, Stosch, Ticer, Wagner, Wampler, Watkins, Whipple and Williams

WHEREAS, established in 1996, the Virginia Coalition for Open Government (VCOG) celebrates its 10th anniversary in 2006; and

WHEREAS, VCOG is a nonpartisan alliance of journalists, librarians, public-interest organizations, and citizen activists who are committed to achieving greater transparency in local and state government for the citizens of Virginia; and

WHEREAS, VCOG works collaboratively with legislators and other public officials, educators, First Amendment lawyers, and interested citizens to strengthen and expand statutory protection for public access to meetings and records; and

WHEREAS, from 1998 to 2000, VCOG was a tireless advocate for the successful creation of the Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory Council (FOIA Council), now widely regarded as a model for states seeking compliance with open-government laws; and

WHEREAS, VCOG was invaluable in increasing the FOIA Council's visibility, co-sponsoring educational programs, designing and distributing promotional materials, and offering Internet access to FOIA Council opinions and training guides; and

WHEREAS, VCOG participates annually in the FOIA Council's advisory work groups and assists the General Assembly in the formulation of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) reforms; and

WHEREAS, VCOG publishes a semiannual newsletter and offers an outstanding website that provides a wealth of information and services, including a widely-respected Internet listserve, an online citizens' FOIA pocket guide, and an impressive archive of more than 300 opinions regarding open-government and related issues by the FOIA Council, the Office of the Attorney General, and the state and federal courts; and

WHEREAS, VCOG also maintains e-mail and telephone hotlines that explain FOIA issues, monitors FOIA compliance throughout the state, and encourages the use of the FOIA Council office as an alternative to litigation; and

WHEREAS, VCOG sponsors a yearly legal fellowship to review access, privacy, and security issues in depth; annual conferences on Right To Know issues; and annual awards that recognize major contributions to open access by citizens, the media, and government throughout Virginia; and

WHEREAS, in honor of VCOG's outstanding service, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation has created a challenge grant to create a permanent VCOG endowment fund, culminating in a 10th anniversary celebration at the Library of Virginia on November 16, 2006; and

WHEREAS, VCOG has helped form successful Freedom of Information advocacy entities in North Carolina, Tennessee, and numerous other states and is widely recognized as a respected and exemplary source of information on government in the sunshine; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly commend and congratulate the Virginia Coalition for Open Government on the occasion of its 10th anniversary; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the Virginia Coalition for Open Government as an expression of the General Assembly's gratitude for its outstanding commitment to the tenets of open government for all of the citizens of the Commonwealth.

INTRODUCED

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