

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 474

Commemorating the life of Zachary Taylor on the 225th anniversary of his birth.

Agreed to by the Senate, February 25, 2009
 Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 27, 2009

WHEREAS, Zachary Taylor was born on November 24, 1784, at "Hare Forest" in Orange County, Virginia, a fifth generation of the Taylor family in the Commonwealth and the son of Sarah Dabney Strother and Colonel Richard Lee Taylor who served as aide-de-camp to General George Washington; and

WHEREAS, Zachary Taylor is best remembered today for his distinguished 40-year military service; he served in the War of 1812 under the command of his cousin, President James Madison; as an aide to General Andrew Jackson; and thereafter, under Presidents James Monroe, John Quincy Adams, Andrew Jackson, Martin Van Buren, William Henry Harrison, John Tyler, and James Polk; and

WHEREAS, Zachary Taylor during these many years was known as a resourceful, steadfast, modest, and compassionate commander who fought many successful battles, earning from his soldiers and countrymen the affectionate nickname "Old Rough and Ready"; he was propelled into greater national prominence in the war with Mexico, becoming an instant legend and hero on the battlefield of Buena Vista; and

WHEREAS, his national prominence spread, as did his personal popularity, causing Zachary Taylor to defeat candidates Henry Clay, Winfield Scott, and Daniel Webster for the Whig Party presidential nomination and, though he had not sought the office, to become elected the 12th President of the United States; and

WHEREAS, in his brief 15 months of presidential authority, President Taylor was propelled into the maelstrom of antebellum politics with slavery as the dominant and stormy issue, and the calm leadership that had made him famous on the battlefield was demonstrated once again by his solid self-confidence and assured determination; he had in his Inaugural Address declared that preservation of the Union would, in accordance with his oath of office and consistent with George Washington's farewell advice, be his first obligation—though a Southerner and slave holder he made no secret of his determination to find a solution to end slavery as his cousin, James Madison, had attempted to do in the drafting of the Constitution; and

WHEREAS, during his 500 days in office, President Taylor created a Department of the Interior, appointing the first secretary; signed a treaty with Great Britain guaranteeing a neutral canal connecting North and South America; and presented his own "President's Plan" for the entry of free states into the Union, while the spread of slavery in the vast new territories would be prohibited entirely until solutions for emancipation, which were underway, could be agreed upon; and

WHEREAS, after California and New Mexico were admitted as free states, President Taylor threatened to try for treason any person attempting to defy these states' decisions by taking a slave across their borders, and declared that he would not hesitate to hang any such person "taken in rebellion against these states and our Union"; and

WHEREAS, on July 4, 1850, after only 16 months into his term as president, and after laying the cornerstone of the Washington Monument, Zachary Taylor suddenly grew ill and passed away; with an unprecedented 100,000 people along the funeral route and in attendance, Abraham Lincoln delivered the eulogy saying "though not all patriotism and wisdom has died with President Taylor I fear the one great question of the day (slavery) is not now so likely to be acquiesced in by the different sections of the Union, as it would have been, could General Taylor have been spared to us"; and

WHEREAS, Thomas Hart Benton, Missouri's great senator, said to a country in mourning, "No man could have been more devoted to the Union or more opposed to slavery his position as a Southerner and a slave holder, his military reputation, and his election by a majority of the people of the United States, would have given him a power in the settlement of these questions which no President without these qualifications could have possessed. His death is our Nation's calamity"; and

WHEREAS, Senator Jefferson Davis of Mississippi, and his former son-in-law, wrote, "brilliant as were Taylor's victories in the war, those who know him best will equally honor him for the purity, the generosity and magnanimity of his private character. His colossal greatness is presented in the Garb of simplicity; his life, wholly devoted to his country had become beautiful in its simplicity, sublime in grandeur"; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting and proper for the Commonwealth to honor the life and services of Zachary Taylor, a Virginia native son and 12th President of the United States; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby

commemorate the life of Zachary Taylor on the occasion of the 225th anniversary of his birth and recognize his valiant courage, his faith, and earnest efforts during his term of office to bring a peaceful end to slavery in the United States and for his many other contributions to the Commonwealth and the nation; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the James Madison Museum as an expression of the General Assembly's admiration and appreciation for the vision and generosity prompted by the "Taylor Memorandum of Gift," which on December 31, 1974, caused the James Madison Foundation to be created, and for the foundation's efforts to promote patriotism and to educate citizens about those who have championed the Republic and its principles of freedom and democracy that continue to make the United States the greatest nation in the world.