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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 271

Offered March 8, 2010

Commending the City of Bristol on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of its iconic sign.

Patrons—Wampler; Delegate: Johnson

WHEREAS, it is fitting that this body should pause in its deliberations to join with the cities and counties that comprise this great state in celebrating joyous and historic occasions; and

WHEREAS, the citizens of the City of Bristol are most assuredly deserving of special recognition, as on Friday, April 30, 2010, they will hold a grand celebration of the 100th anniversary of the most famous landmark of the Twin Cities of Bristol, Virginia, and Bristol, Tennessee; this iconic landmark is the electric sign located on State Street in the oldest section of the city, above the line dividing Virginia and Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, the Bristol sign has proudly stood above the Twin Cities for 100 years and says what residents believe: "Bristol VA-Tenn - A Good Place to Live"; and

WHEREAS, the rich history of the sign begins in 1910, when the Bristol Gas and Electric Company, which had a tradition of donating an advertising sign to the local communities in which they operated, was purchased by Doherty & Company; the company's owner, Henry L. Doherty, donated the sign to the City of Bristol, Virginia, and the City of Bristol, Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, the sign was manufactured by the Greenway Advertising Company of Knoxville, Tennessee, at the cost of \$1,100, transported by a special railcar, erected on the side of the Interstate Hardware Building, and dedicated on July 4th, 1910, with over 3,000 citizens in attendance; and

WHEREAS, at the time of the dedication, the sign's proportions were 60 feet wide by 35 feet high, with 834 incandescent bulbs; it read, "Push! That's Bristol," which was the mantra of the day coined by Charles M. Brown, the president of the Bristol Board of Trade, to encourage commercial and industrial development; and

WHEREAS, according to Dr. I.F. Hicks, member of the Board of Mayor and Aldermen of Bristol, Tennessee, "the mammoth electric sign was evidence of the continued growth and progressiveness of the city"; Bristol, Virginia, Mayor W.L. Rice pushed the switch to light the sign; and

WHEREAS, from 1910 to 1915, the sign was mounted on the top of the Interstate Hardware Building next to the junction of two major rail lines, the Norfolk and Western and the Southern, which was the interstate highway system of the day; and

WHEREAS, in 1915, the sign was reconstructed by the Greenway Advertising Company of Knoxville at a cost of \$500, which was split by both cities, and moved to its current location over State Street; at the time, it was noted as "one of the largest signs in the nation," rising 25 feet above the street; and

WHEREAS, in 1917, green and red lights were added to the center of the sign; and

WHEREAS, in 1921, the Bristol Advertising Club offered a \$10 prize for the best new slogan for the Bristol sign; Jim Cecil, president of Interstate Hardware and Bristol Rotary, won the contest from among over 200 entries with "Bristol-A Good Place to Live"; and

WHEREAS, this new slogan was marketed by both the Virginia and the Tennessee sides' city governments, and it endures to this day; and

WHEREAS, following urban renewal in downtown Bristol in the 1960s, there were several efforts to dismantle the aging sign, but a grassroots effort was begun to save Bristol's marketing icon; in 1982, local civic organizations, local news media, and loyal citizens began a "Save Our Sign" campaign, resulting in the total reconstruction of the Bristol slogan sign, which was completed in 1989; and

WHEREAS, on September 8, 1988, this landmark became one of the first signs ever included on the National Register of Historic Places; and

WHEREAS, numerous qualities set the Bristol sign apart; it contains 1,332 light bulbs, rises 53 feet above the street, and showcases letters from three to seven feet tall; it is an early example of electric signage that predates electric street lighting; and it is unusually large for a 60-by-35-foot sign that is self-standing, instead of mounted on a commercial building; and

WHEREAS, through decades of history, the City of Bristol's sign has remained an endearing tourist attraction and the pivotal element that unifies these two proud, thriving cities; and

WHEREAS, this anniversary celebration honors not only this faithful landmark but also a century of citizens who have protected it and provided for its upkeep; and

WHEREAS, the City of Bristol is one of the great municipalities in Virginia, and it is most appropriate that the members of this legislative body should honor this fine city and its citizenry as they commemorate this significant milestone in their historic existence; now, therefore, be it

INTRODUCED

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59 RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly
60 commend the citizens of the City of Bristol upon the 100th anniversary of their iconic city sign; and, be
61 it

62 RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for
63 presentation to the City of Bristol as an expression of the General Assembly's congratulations and best
64 wishes for continued success, growth, and prosperity.