

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 491

Celebrating the life of Young Woo Kang, Ph.D.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, March 6, 2012

Agreed to by the Senate, March 8, 2012

WHEREAS, Young Woo Kang, Ph.D., of Springfield, who triumphed over disability to open doors of opportunity for others around the world, died on February 23, 2012; and

WHEREAS, a native of the Gyeonggi Province in South Korea, Young Kang faced great personal tragedy and discrimination as a youth; his father died when he was 13, and the following year he lost his eyesight; and

WHEREAS, after several unsuccessful surgeries, Young Kang was told his sight could not be restored; his mother and one of his sisters both died shortly thereafter; and

WHEREAS, at a time when options were severely limited for those who were blind, Young Kang defied convention and fought to forge a future for himself; and

WHEREAS, Young Kang challenged the university system that at first denied him the opportunity to take the college entrance exam, eventually placing tenth among hundreds of applicants and graduating with high honors from Yonsei University; and

WHEREAS, Young Kang fought discrimination again as he struggled to have the opportunity to study abroad; and

WHEREAS, after successfully lobbying the Korean Ministry of Education and with the support of a Rotary Foundation Ambassadorial Scholarship and additional scholarships from the University of Pittsburgh, Young Kang became the first blind Korean to earn a Ph.D.; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Kang turned his energies to helping others facing disabilities and discrimination, creating a foundation that advocated for those with disabilities and sharing his inspirational life story with others in his autobiography *A Light in My Heart*, which was translated into seven languages and became a Library of Congress talking book and the basis of television shows and movies in South Korea; and

WHEREAS, empathetic to the needs of those with disabilities in his native land, Dr. Kang, through his foundation and as a board member of Goodwill Industries International, Inc., founded Goodwill Industries of Korea to provide those with disabilities and others trying to enter the workforce with the opportunity to gain valuable job training and experience; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Kang worked with American and South Korean government leaders to encourage passage of legislation in Korea similar to the Americans with Disabilities Act, establishing crucial legal rights for those with disabilities; and

WHEREAS, an internationally recognized expert on disability rights, Dr. Kang served as vice-chair of the World Committee on Disability and as a senior advisor to the Roosevelt Institute and was a driving force behind the two organizations' creation of the Franklin D. Roosevelt International Disability Award to recognize those nations that make noteworthy progress toward the United Nations World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons; and

WHEREAS, a board member of the National Organization on Disability, Dr. Kang was nominated by President George W. Bush to the National Council on Disability, an independent federal agency that makes recommendations to the President and Congress on issues affecting Americans with disabilities; and

WHEREAS, for six years, Dr. Kang provided valuable insight and guidance to the council as he worked on issues as varied as the inclusion of people with disabilities in emergency planning and how to empower those facing disability; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Kang garnered numerous awards and accolades throughout his extraordinary career, including an honorary doctorate from Yonsei University, recognition as a University of Pittsburgh Distinguished Alumni Fellow, and the Rotary Foundation's Global Alumni Service to Humanity Award; and

WHEREAS, possessed of an indomitable spirit and courageous heart, Dr. Kang leaves behind a remarkable and inspiring legacy of extraordinary influence and service; and

WHEREAS, devoted to his family, Young Kang will be fondly remembered and greatly missed by his wife, Kyoung Sook Kang; children, Paul Kang and Christopher Kang, and their families; and numerous other family members, friends, and admirers; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby note with great sadness the loss of a pioneering disability rights advocate and an outstanding Virginian, Young Woo Kang, Ph.D.; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the family of Young Woo Kang, Ph.D., as an expression of the General Assembly's respect for his memory.