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## HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 553

Offered January 14, 2015

Prefiled January 6, 2015

*Commemorating the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty.*

Patron—McQuinn

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, in his State of the Union address on January 8, 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson declared "war on poverty," stating, "Unfortunately, many Americans live on the outskirts of hope—some because of their poverty, and some because of their color, and all too many because of both. Our task is to help replace their despair with opportunity. This administration today, here and now, declares unconditional war on poverty in America. I urge this Congress and all Americans to join with me in that effort"; and

WHEREAS, several initiatives designed to improve the education, health, skills, and jobs of impoverished persons, and their access to economic resources, were introduced, and in the decades that followed, bipartisan success in fighting poverty was accomplished by expanding economic opportunity and rewarding hard work; and

WHEREAS, the War on Poverty announced by President Johnson centered on four pieces of legislation: (i) the Social Security Amendments of 1965, which created Medicare and Medicaid and expanded Social Security benefits for retirees, widows, the disabled, and college-aged students, financed by an increase in the payroll tax cap and rates; (ii) the Food Stamp Act of 1964, which permanently authorized a 1962 anti-hunger pilot program; (iii) the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, which established numerous antipoverty initiatives, including Job Corps, the VISTA program, the federal work-study program, and the Office of Economic Opportunity, the arm of the White House responsible for implementing antipoverty programs, including the Head Start program; and (iv) the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, more recently the No Child Left Behind Act, which was signed into law in 1965 and established the Title I program that subsidizes school districts with a large share of impoverished students; and

WHEREAS, since 1967, poverty has declined in the United States by more than one-third, from 25.8 percent in 1967 to 16 percent in 2012, according to the Supplemental Poverty Measure developed by the Bureau of the Census; and

WHEREAS, although significant progress has been made in the War on Poverty, considerable work remains to be done; in 2012, 49.7 million Americans, 13.4 million of whom were children, were dealing with the economic and social hardships of living below the poverty line; and

WHEREAS, the United States is widely proclaimed the land of opportunity, yet only half of low-income Americans escape the lowest fifth of the income distribution over a 20-year period, as reported by the Council of Economic Advisers in January 2014; and

WHEREAS, the poverty rate dropped among persons 65 and older, from 35 percent in 1960 to 14.8 percent in 2012, due to expansions in Social Security; the deep poverty rate, which measures the number of persons living below 50 percent of the federal poverty level, has also declined, due in large part to low-income tax credits and other government benefits; and

WHEREAS, increasingly, antipoverty programs have focused on rewarding and encouraging work, and today poverty is battled on multiple fronts by supplementing income when earnings are low; improving access to education, health insurance, shelter, and a minimal food budget to reduce material hardship; and assisting job hunters; and

WHEREAS, the War on Poverty built an effective safety net to improve the lives of many less fortunate Americans, which in turn protects and strengthens the economic and social security of the country by increasing individuals' ability to contribute to the welfare of the nation; and

WHEREAS, unfortunately, nearly 50 million Americans still live in poverty, of which 13.4 million are children; therefore, the country's war on poverty is far from complete; and

WHEREAS, in a 2014 report, the Council of Economic Advisers stated that "our nation has grown much richer, and today, the total shortfall below poverty is only 0.6 percent of GDP; however, continuing to make progress in closing the shortfall will require defending the programs that have helped reduce poverty and efforts to strengthen the economy, increase growth, and ensure that growth is reflected in broad-based wage gains so that families lift themselves out of poverty"; and

WHEREAS, President Johnson's admonition must continue to be a challenge to the Commonwealth and the nation: "Our aim is not only to relieve the symptoms of poverty, but to cure it and, above all, to

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59 prevent it"; now, therefore, be it

60 RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the 50th anniversary of the War  
61 on Poverty be commemorated; and, be it

62 RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates transmit a copy of this resolution  
63 to the Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Social Services and the executive directors of the  
64 Federation of Virginia Food Banks, the Child Advocacy Network of Virginia, the Virginia Community  
65 Action Partnership, and the Virginia Poverty Law Center, requesting that they further disseminate copies  
66 of this resolution to their respective constituents so that they may be apprised of the sense of the  
67 General Assembly of Virginia in this matter.