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**HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 181**

Offered January 19, 2016

*Designating the Norfolk & Western Railway Class J 611 as the official steam locomotive of Virginia.*

Patrons—Head, Habeeb, Kilgore, Lopez, Miller, O'Quinn, Ware and Yancey

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, the Class J 611, one of 14 passenger locomotives built for the Norfolk & Western Railway between 1941 and 1950, is the only Class J still in existence; and

WHEREAS, the Class J 611 emerged from the Roanoke East End Shops on May 29, 1950, at a cost of \$251,544; the train was the most powerful passenger steam locomotive ever built, operating at 300 psi with a tractive effort of 80,000 pounds; and

WHEREAS, the simple lines, bullet nose, and Tuscan red stripe of the Class J 611 made this steam locomotive one of the most beautiful ever designed; the Class J 611 could pull 15 cars at 110 mph and was the pride of the Norfolk & Western Railway; this class of steam locomotives powered such famous passenger trains as the Powhatan Arrow, Cavalier, and Pocahontas between Cincinnati, Ohio, and Norfolk and between Monroe, North Carolina, and Bristol, Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, the Class J 611 also pulled the Tennessean, the Pelican, and the Birmingham Special between Monroe, Virginia; Bristol, Tennessee; and Bristol, Virginia; and

WHEREAS, the Class J 611 averaged 15,000 miles per month, and some of the steam locomotives in this class had traveled nearly three million miles by the time they were retired in 1959; after passenger service was dieselized in 1957, some steam locomotives were used in freight service; and

WHEREAS, the Class J 611, together with the Class A and Y freight engines, represented the ingenuity of the Norfolk & Western Railway engineers and the high point of steam technology; the use of roller bearings on the driver and tender axles provided a smoother ride and quicker acceleration, and more than 200 moving parts were lubricated by a mechanized system, cutting down time to service the engine; and

WHEREAS, on January 23, 1956, the Class J 611 derailed along the Tug River near Cedar, West Virginia, and made its final regular run from Bluefield, West Virginia, to Roanoke in October 1959; the train was returned to the shops in Roanoke and completely restored; and

WHEREAS, due to rising operating costs, Norfolk & Western Railway switched to diesel locomotives in 1957; however, the Class J 611 was selected to pull the company's "farewell to steam" excursions in October 1959; and

WHEREAS, several persons, including famed Norfolk & Western photographer O. Winston Link and Roanoke natives Graham Claytor and Robert Claytor, requested that company president Stuart Saunders save the Class J 611 from destruction, to which he agreed; the train was donated to the Roanoke Transportation Museum, now known as the Virginia Museum of Transportation, for static display, where it sat outside in the elements waiting for the chance to steam again; and

WHEREAS, in 1981, Norfolk Southern Railway president Robert Claytor sent the train to the Norris Steam Shop in Birmingham, Alabama, where it became the star of the Norfolk Southern steam program and pulled excursions throughout the eastern United States, traveling as far south as Florida, north to New York, and west to Chicago; and

WHEREAS, the Class J 611 traveled the main lines for 12 years, re-creating the golden age of American railroading and inspiring a new generation of steam locomotive fans; the Norfolk Southern Railway's new "21st Century Steam" program brought steam trains back to the main line for employee specials and public excursions; however, the excursion program was ended in 1994 and the Class J 611 was returned to Roanoke to serve as a static display; and

WHEREAS, in 2013, the Virginia Museum of Transportation announced the "Fire Up 611!" initiative to determine the feasibility of returning the train to excursion service; thousands of dollars in donations were received to restore the "Queen of Steam," and the Norfolk & Western Class J 611 has returned under her own steam to the Virginia Museum of Transportation and is on display in the Rail Yard, home of the largest concentration of rail stock in the state; and

WHEREAS, the Class J 611 serves as a mobile ambassador for the Virginia Museum of Transportation to captivate, educate, and inspire visitors; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly designate the Norfolk & Western Railway Class J 611 as the official steam locomotive of Virginia; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates transmit a copy of this resolution to Beverly T. Fitzpatrick, Jr., executive director of the Virginia Museum of Transportation, so that

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59 members of the Museum may be apprised of the sense of the General Assembly of Virginia in this  
60 matter; and, be it

61       RESOLVED FINALLY, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates post the designation of the  
62 Norfolk & Western Railway Class J 611 as the official steam locomotive of Virginia on the General  
63 Assembly's website.