

2021 SESSION

ENROLLED

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 342

Celebrating the life of Wendell Harding Butler.

Agreed to by the Senate, February 4, 2021
Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 8, 2021

WHEREAS, Wendell Harding Butler, an esteemed dentist, honorable veteran, and distinguished public official who served as vice mayor of Roanoke and made history as the first African American chairman of the Roanoke City School Board, died on November 5, 2020; and

WHEREAS, raised in Texas, Wendell Butler graduated high school at the age of 15 and briefly attended Prairie View College before setting his sights on dental school; denied the opportunity to attend the University of Texas due to the school's segregationist policies, he ultimately received a full scholarship to Howard University; and

WHEREAS, after completing his studies, Wendell Butler interned at Freedmen's Hospital in Washington, D.C., from 1949 to 1950 and was an oral surgery instructor at Howard University from 1950 to 1951; and

WHEREAS, Wendell Butler served his country with honor and valor as a member of the United States Air Force from 1951 to 1953, rising to the rank of captain; and

WHEREAS, following his military service, Wendell Butler returned to Roanoke and opened a dental practice that he would operate for the next 35 years, providing exceptional care to innumerable patients as he became a cherished fixture in their lives; and

WHEREAS, during the civil rights movement of the 1960s, Wendell Butler took great interest in public service; he would be appointed to the Roanoke Redevelopment and Housing Authority's Board of Commissioners in 1968 and then the Roanoke City School Board two years later; and

WHEREAS, dedicated to the success and well-being of young people in his community, Wendell Butler was a member of the Roanoke City School Board for 10 years, making history in 1976 as the first African American to serve as the board's chairman; and

WHEREAS, following his tenure on the Roanoke City School Board, Wendell Butler served on the Roanoke City Council from 1980 to 1984, including a term as vice mayor of Roanoke from 1980 to 1982; an admired and effective leader, he was later appointed twice to fill vacancies on the council, first in 1996 and then in 2000; and

WHEREAS, Wendell Butler was sought by state and local leaders for his wisdom and counsel; during the terms of Governors Chuck Robb and L. Douglas Wilder, he served on various statewide boards, including the Southern Regional Education Board and the State Water Control Board, and in the early 1990s he led a task force that studied the at-large election system in Roanoke; and

WHEREAS, Wendell Butler left an indelible mark on the Roanoke community; along with chairing the board of commissioners of the Roanoke Redevelopment and Housing Authority, he was a member of the boards of Blue Ridge Public Television and the local chapters of the United Way and the YMCA; and

WHEREAS, guided throughout his life by his deep and abiding faith, Wendell Butler enjoyed worship and fellowship with his community at First Baptist Church in Gainsboro for 67 years, serving as a trustee and Sunday school teacher; and

WHEREAS, preceded in death by his loving wife of 71 years, Susie, Wendell Butler will be fondly remembered and dearly missed by his children, Wanda, Karen, Carol, and Susan, and their families; and numerous other family members and friends; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby note with great sadness the loss of Wendell Harding Butler, a revered public servant whose unwavering optimism and sense of purpose had a profound and lasting impact on the Roanoke community; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the family of Wendell Harding Butler as an expression of the General Assembly's respect for his memory.

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