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HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 174

Offered February 20, 2024

*Celebrating the life of Rachel Gayle Davis Fowlkes.*

Patron—Kilgore

WHEREAS, Rachel Gayle Davis Fowlkes of Abingdon, a passionate educator and a visionary community leader who enhanced the quality of life in Southwest Virginia by promoting economic development and new opportunities for local residents, died on April 1, 2023; and

WHEREAS, a native of Meridian, Mississippi, Rachel Fowlkes was a first-generation college student and graduated from Millsaps College, where she was a member of Chi Omega, the Millsaps Singers, and the varsity cheerleading squad; and

WHEREAS, Rachel Fowlkes subsequently earned a master's degree from Mississippi State University and a doctoral degree from the University of Virginia; and

WHEREAS, Rachel Fowlkes moved to Abingdon in 1969 and resided on Main Street for many years; she quickly became a fixture of local life and was well-known by generations of families as an elementary school teacher, special education teacher, and special education supervisor throughout Washington County; and

WHEREAS, later in her career, Rachel Fowlkes shifted her focus to post-secondary education and became the director of the University of Virginia's continuing education programs in the region, then the statewide education coordinator; she was an early pioneer in the use of satellite television and online programs for distance learning; and

WHEREAS, Rachel Fowlkes promoted the correlation between education and economic development and played a pivotal role in the creation of the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center, where she served as founding executive director and guided the agency for 24 years until her retirement in 2015; and

WHEREAS, under the leadership of Rachel Fowlkes, the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center partnered with 10 colleges and universities throughout the Commonwealth to offer advanced degrees, provide professional development conferences and seminars, and host regional economic development events; and

WHEREAS, Rachel Fowlkes spent countless hours driving around Southwest Virginia to listen to the concerns of residents, students, and businesses so that she could craft programs and strategies that reflected real-world needs; she could be recognized by her custom license plate: CR8JOBS; and

WHEREAS, Rachel Fowlkes provided her expertise to several other local and regional boards and commissions to enhance life in the region; she enjoyed fellowship and worship with the congregation of Sinking Spring Presbyterian Church and was a frequent volunteer at Ecumenical Faith in Action; and

WHEREAS, outside of her career and community service, Rachel Fowlkes enjoyed spending time with friends and family at her farm in Alvarado, where she built two unique treehouses overlooking the Virginia Creeper Trail; and

WHEREAS, Rachel Fowlkes will be fondly remembered and greatly missed by her children, Merrill and John, and their families, and numerous other family members and friends; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the House of Delegates hereby note with great sadness the loss of Rachel Gayle Davis Fowlkes, a highly admired educator and community leader who touched countless lives in Southwest Virginia; 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 Rachel Gayle Davis Fowlkes as an expression of the House of Delegates' respect for her memory.