

South Dakota Legislature



House Commemoration 8018

Introduced by: **Representatives** Nelson, Bartels, Duba, Emery, Kull, Lesmeister, Moore, Mortenson, Olson, Ernie Otten, Perry, Pinnow, Pourier, Reisch, Stevens, Venhuizen, and Wittman and **Senators** Bordeaux, Deibert, Diedrich, Duhamel, Foster, Larson, Mehlhaff, Nesiba, Reed, and Schoenbeck

A LEGISLATIVE COMMEMORATION, Honoring the life and legacy of U.S. Senator James Abourezk.

WHEREAS, James Abourezk was a lifelong public servant with a storied career. Abourezk grew up on the Rosebud Indian Reservation and was one of five children born to Lebanese immigrants. He joined the U.S. Navy and served in the Korean War, where he supported Navy ships stationed in Japan. After his military service, Abourezk worked as a rancher, blackjack dealer, and judo instructor, earned a degree in civil engineering, and, at the age of thirty-two, pursued a law degree from the University of South Dakota; and

WHEREAS, Abourezk was a member of the Democratic Party and represented South Dakota for single terms in the U.S. House and Senate during the 1970s, becoming the first Arab American elected to the U.S. Senate. He fought passionately for farmers, consumers, and Native American people. He chaired the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs and sparked the creation of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, and the Indian Child Welfare Act. Abourezk fought against natural gas deregulation and became an outspoken critic of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. After leaving Congress, he continued to advocate for Native American and foreign policy issues; and

WHEREAS, Abourezk married Sanaa Dieb in 1991 and is survived by four children, Charles, Nikki, Paul, and Alya, and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He passed away at his home in Sioux Falls on February 24, 2023:

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT COMMEMORATED, by the Ninety-Eighth Legislature of the State of South Dakota, the remarkable life and legacy of James Abourezk.