

By Senator Joyner

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Senate Resolution

A resolution remembering the remarkable life and public service of former Senator Helen Gordon Davis and expressing a profound sense of loss in her passing.

WHEREAS, Helen Gordon Davis was born on December 25, 1926, in New York City, and

WHEREAS, when she was just 15 years old, Helen Gordon Davis became a "Powers Girl," modeling for the John Robert Powers Agency in New York City, and

WHEREAS, Helen Gordon Davis earned a degree in theater from Brooklyn College and appeared in George Bernard Shaw radio plays on New York City's WNYC, and

WHEREAS, in 1948, Helen Gordon Davis and her husband, Gene Davis, moved to Tampa, and in 1953, they built a home in Davis Islands, where they raised their three children, Gordon, Stephanie, and Karen, and

WHEREAS, Helen Gordon Davis wholeheartedly embraced the role of wife and mother and continued to pursue creative endeavors by teaching high school drama and acting in community theater, where she won two Gaspar Awards, and

WHEREAS, Helen Gordon Davis went on to earn a master's degree in theater from the University of South Florida, and

WHEREAS, Helen Gordon Davis's striking good looks paled in comparison to her intellect, wit, integrity, and determination, which she demonstrated throughout her personal and public life, and

WHEREAS, in the 1950s, Helen Gordon Davis emerged as an

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30 unlikely champion of civil rights after a bus driver refused to  
31 allow her black housekeeper to sit with her children in the  
32 front of a city bus on a shopping trip, and

33 WHEREAS, shortly after the fateful shopping trip, Helen  
34 Gordon Davis marched down Nebraska Avenue, children in tow, to  
35 join the local chapter of the NAACP, becoming the first white  
36 woman in Florida to hold NAACP membership, and

37 WHEREAS, the indomitable Helen Gordon Davis went on to join  
38 black patrons at a Woolworth's lunch counter to press for  
39 desegregation of Tampa's public facilities, and

40 WHEREAS, in 1974, Helen Gordon Davis became the first woman  
41 from Hillsborough County elected to the Florida House of  
42 Representatives, where she encountered dismissiveness and, in  
43 some cases, hostility from a number of her male colleagues, and

44 WHEREAS, despite this adversity, Helen Gordon Davis held  
45 fast to her commitment to fight institutionalized injustice  
46 against women, minorities, and the poor, championing legislation  
47 to benefit displaced homemakers and to ensure equal pay for  
48 women and minority state workers, and

49 WHEREAS, Helen Gordon Davis was reelected six times to her  
50 seat in the House of Representatives and in 1988 was elected to  
51 the Florida Senate, where she served with great distinction for  
52 one term, and

53 WHEREAS, with her husband, Helen Gordon Davis provided the  
54 financial support for the founding of Tampa's Centre for Women,  
55 a pillar of support for victims of domestic violence and women  
56 facing financial ruin after divorce, which now bears her name,  
57 and

58 WHEREAS, Helen Gordon Davis was the first recipient of the

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59 League of Women Voters of Hillsborough County's Lifetime  
60 Achievement Award and was inducted into the Hillsborough County  
61 Women's Hall of Fame by the Commission on the Status of Women,  
62 and

63 WHEREAS, in an interview with the Tampa Bay Times, Helen  
64 Gordon Davis's daughter, Stephanie Davis, remembered her mother  
65 as "a fierce warrior and a vanguard for social change who raised  
66 us all to be strong and independent and to follow our own path,"  
67 and

68 WHEREAS, Helen Gordon Davis changed the face of the  
69 Legislature by challenging strongholds of discrimination and was  
70 fearless in fighting for the rights of all Floridians, NOW,  
71 THEREFORE,

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73 Be It Resolved by the Senate of the State of Florida:

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75 That we pause to remember the remarkable life and public  
76 service of our friend and former colleague Senator Helen Gordon  
77 Davis and express a profound sense of loss in her passing.

78 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this resolution, with  
79 the Seal of the Senate affixed, be presented to Gordon,  
80 Stephanie, and Karen Davis as a tangible token of the sentiments  
81 of the Florida Senate.