

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION mourning the death of Pete Seeger, celebrated folk music troubadour and activist

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to honor and pay just tribute to those musical geniuses whose commitment and creative talents contributed to the enrichment of their community and the world and to pay homage to a man whose life of activism and accomplishment stands as an inspiration to others; and

WHEREAS, This Legislative Body is moved this day to memorialize the purposeful life and career of Pete Seeger of Beacon, New York, a prominent figure in the history of folk music and renowned activist who died on Monday, January 27, 2014, at the age of 94; and

WHEREAS, Born on May 3, 1919, in New York, New York, to Charles and Constance Seeger, young Pete began playing the ukulele while attending boarding school; and

WHEREAS, In 1936, his life was changed forever when he heard the five-string banjo for the first time at the Folk Song and Dance Festival in Asheville, North Carolina, ultimately becoming his main instrument; he also went on to learn the six-string guitar, 12-string guitar, and the recorder; and

WHEREAS, After briefly attending Harvard University in 1938, where he discovered politics and helped found a student newspaper, THE HARVARD PROGRESSIVE, Seeger decided to move to Washington, D.C., where he took a job with the Archives of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress and learned much of the music that he would perform around the world throughout his storied career; and

WHEREAS, Pete Seeger was drafted into the United States Army in 1942, and served honorably in the Pacific where he was trained as an airplane mechanic; he was then reassigned to provide much needed entertainment to the American troops with music serving three and a half years in the Special Services and achieving the rank of Corporal; and

WHEREAS, On July 20, 1943, Pete Seeger married Toshi-Aline Ohta, his wife of 69 years, until her passing in 2013; and

WHEREAS, In 1949, Pete and Toshi Seeger purchased a plot of land near Beacon, New York, where together, they built their own home, a log cabin; and

WHEREAS, Pete Seeger and Lee Hays co-wrote "If I Had a Hammer," one of the most optimistic paeans to the possibilities of constructive social change; other internationally known songs he co-wrote include "Where Have All the Flowers Gone" and "Turn, Turn, Turn"; and

WHEREAS, By 1950, the duo, along with Fred Hellerman and Ronnie Gilbert, formed the Weavers, and enjoyed instant success with highly sweetened versions of "Goodnight Irene" and other folk tunes; and

WHEREAS, Pete Seeger stood steadfast in his beliefs even when the expression of his views posed a threat to his personal freedom; and

WHEREAS, On August 14, 1955, Pete Seeger was subpoenaed to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee, where he refused to plead his Fifth Amendment Right and instead asserted his First Amendment Right not to speak on the grounds that no American should be forced to answer any questions regarding his philosophical, political, and religious beliefs and associations; and

WHEREAS, On July 26, 1956, the House of Representatives voted 373 to 9 to cite Pete Seeger and seven others for contempt of Congress; in March of 1961, he was sentenced to ten 1-year terms in jail to be served simultaneously, and finally in May of 1962, an appeals court ruled the indictment to be flawed and overturned his conviction after he spent four hours behind bars; and

WHEREAS, Pete Seeger was also an outspoken activist, promoting civil

rights, social justice, peace and disarmament, and an awareness of our environment; his rendition of "We Shall Overcome" became the anthem of the Civil Rights Movement; and

WHEREAS, Pete and Toshi Seeger marched in the historic voting rights marches from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama in March of 1965; and

WHEREAS, In 1966, Pete and Toshi Seeger founded Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, Inc., a world renowned educational vessel which inspired the cleanup of the Hudson River, located in Beacon, New York, along with the Great Hudson River Revival, an annual music and environmental festival that takes place at Croton Point Park in Croton, New York; and

WHEREAS, Pete Seeger founded and regularly participated in the Beacon Sloop Club, Beacon, New York, and equipped it with their flagship sloop, The Woody Guthrie, which offers free educational sailing trips on the Hudson River; and

WHEREAS, Furthermore, Pete Seeger performed at the Hoot Festival at the Ashokan Center to raise money for children to participate in the Ashokan Education program; he sang at the Walkway Over the Hudson Gala ceremony; performed with his half-sister, Peggy Seeger, in Woodstock to benefit the Woodstock Byrdcliffe; and was a Special Guest at "Journey to Freedom", a concert for the benefit of the group Save Them Now which is a Kingston religion-based group that provides housing and rehabilitation for nonviolent ex-convicts and recovering drug/alcohol addicts; and

WHEREAS, Pete Seeger enjoyed visits to Beacon elementary school classes to teach children how songs can be used to make positive change, which fostered the Emmy Award winning CD "Tomorrow's Children" with the "Rivertown Kids"; and

WHEREAS, This noted musician has received many awards and medals, some of which include: the National Medal of Arts, Kennedy Center Honor, Harvard Arts Medal, the Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize, and the George Peabody Medal, and in 1996, Pete Seeger was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame; he also received several Grammys, including a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 1993; and

WHEREAS, In 2009, Pete Seeger was proud and honored to perform "This Land Is Your Land" with Bruce Springsteen and his grandson, Tao Rodriguez-Seeger, at the inauguration of President Barack Obama; and

WHEREAS, In addition to working with Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger collaborated with countless other musical icons including Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, the Stanley Brothers, Mississippi John Hurt, Doc Watson, Reverend Gary Davis, Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson, Neil Young, John
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Mellencamp and Dave Matthews; and

WHEREAS, In addition to his wife, Toshi Seeger, Pete Seeger is predeceased by his half-brother Mike; he is survived by his son, Daniel; two daughters, Mika and Tinya; and his half-sister, Peggy; as well as six grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, Pete Seeger inspired whole generations of folk and popular artists and imbued in them a sense of social responsibility, political activism and environmental awareness; and

WHEREAS, It is the custom of this Legislative Body to remember the life and accomplishments of legendary musicians such as Pete Seeger, whose illustrious career was spent championing folk music as both a vital heritage and a catalyst for social change; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to mourn the death of Pete Seeger, and to express its deepest condolences to his family; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the family of Pete Seeger.