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SENATE RESOLUTION

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WHEREAS, The members of the Illinois Senate are saddened to learn of the death of Benjamin J. "Ben" Cheek of Rantoul, who passed away on March 9, 2021; and

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WHEREAS, Ben Cheek was born to Bertha (Hunter) and Benjamin Cheek in Warrenton, North Carolina on May 8, 1936; he joined the U.S. Air Force and served as a fire protection specialist and with a helicopter rescue group; he served overseas in England and Africa and was stationed at a variety of locations throughout the U.S.; he married Emily Harris in Washington, D.C. on June 6, 1959 and completed his 20-year Air Force career at Chanute Air Force Base in Rantoul; and

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WHEREAS, Ben Cheek often held a second job in addition to his full-time military service; he was a bouncer at the base NCO Club, bagged groceries at the commissary, and worked at Eisner's grocery store in Rantoul, serving first in the meat department and then the produce department; he became the grocery manager and finally the manager of the entire store; and

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WHEREAS, Ben Cheek retired from the Air Force and worked as a civil servant, where he was in charge of coordinating many training manuals for all of the Armed Forces; he also worked

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1 one more part-time stint as a bus driver, this time for Rantoul
2 Township High School; and

3 WHEREAS, Ben Cheek spent time as a firefighter; during
4 Fire Prevention Week, he would visit his children's schools
5 and give them and their classmates rides on his fire truck; and

6 WHEREAS, Ben Cheek served on the Rantoul City Schools
7 Board of Education for 17 years; and

8 WHEREAS, Ben Cheek was not political, but in 1968, when
9 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, the local
10 television station in Minot announced it would not carry his
11 funeral; he and his wife helped organize a protest and letter
12 writing campaign that led the station to reverse that decision
13 and honor Dr. King with live coverage of his services; and

14 WHEREAS, Ben Cheek and his wife volunteered as chaperones
15 at school dances, and he attended as many of his
16 grandchildren's events and activities as possible; he loved
17 giving them creative pet names; he was a devoted and
18 protective father and grandfather; and

19 WHEREAS, Ben Cheek was an active member of Rantoul First
20 United Methodist Church for 47 years, where he served in many
21 ways; he was on the Board of Trustees, a member of the finance

1 committee, an usher, and the elevator operator; and

2 WHEREAS, Ben Cheek was an avid sports fan; he and his wife
3 were season ticket holders for the University of Illinois
4 basketball team; his favorite baseball team was the New York
5 Mets, although he also rooted for the Cubs; he was a devoted
6 fan of the Green Bay Packers, but he would support the Chicago
7 Bears; his barbecue grilling skills were legendary; and

8 WHEREAS, Ben Cheek was affectionate and often showed his
9 love in simple ways like preparing Emily's special coffee or
10 the special drink they shared, scraping the car windows for
11 his daughters after a snowfall, and treating Emily and, years
12 after she passed, Harriette Dottery, as the treasures he knew
13 they were; he spent the last years of his life doing the things
14 he loved with Harriette, enjoying being with family, meeting
15 new people, and traveling; and

16 WHEREAS, Ben Cheek was preceded in death by his wife,
17 Emily; his parents; and all seven of his siblings; and

18 WHEREAS, Ben Cheek is survived by his companion,
19 Harriette; his children, Ramona, Keith (Amy), Sharon (Shonda
20 Russell), Monica (Sam) Hall, and Niki (Asa) Pettit; and his
21 grandchildren, Quintin, Eric, and Emily Cheek, Jordan and
22 Nathan Russell, Samuel IV, Anisa, and Elijah Hall, and Ameea

1 and Kalel Pettit; therefore, be it

2 RESOLVED, BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED SECOND GENERAL
3 ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that we mourn the passing of
4 Benjamin J. "Ben" Cheek and extend our sincere condolences to
5 his family, friends, and all who knew and loved him; and be it
6 further

7 RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be
8 presented to the family of Ben Cheek as an expression of our
9 deepest sympathy.