

1 A MEMORIAL

2 RECOGNIZING AND HONORING GERALD "JERRY" PITZL, PH.D., AS A
3 MEMBER OF THE FIRST EXPEDITION TO INDISPUTABLY REACH THE
4 NORTH POLE BY SURFACE TRAVEL; REQUESTING THAT THE GOVERNOR
5 PROCLAIM APRIL 20, 2018 "GERALD 'JERRY' PITZL DAY" IN NEW
6 MEXICO.

7
8 WHEREAS, Guinness world records recognizes that the
9 earliest indisputable attainment of the north pole by surface
10 travel over the sea-ice took place when expedition leader
11 Ralph Plaisted, an insurance salesman, accompanied by Walter
12 Pederson, the trip mechanic, Gerald "Jerry" Pitzl, a high
13 school geography teacher turned expedition navigator, and
14 Jean Luc Bombardier, a Canadian and member of the Bombardier
15 family, founders of Bombardier, incorporated, reached the
16 pole after a forty-five-day trek on four sixteen-horsepower
17 Bombardier-manufactured Ski-Doo snowmobiles; and

18 WHEREAS, the expedition team members were not
19 experienced explorers, but ordinary men who endured
20 temperatures that dipped to minus sixty-two degrees
21 Fahrenheit and rarely rose above minus forty, and who
22 suffered through two forty-mile-per-hour wind storms that
23 confined them to their tents for a week at a time; and

24 WHEREAS, the team spent months preparing for the
25 expedition, including sleeping on a frozen Minnesota lake and

1 engineering ingenious clothing – an inner parka made of
2 poplin with a wolverine fur hood layered underneath a duck
3 canvas exterior parka, each dyed a different color so the men
4 could identify each other in conditions of low visibility;
5 and

6 WHEREAS, more than fifty companies assisted the
7 expedition, including the Minnesota-based Pillsbury flour
8 mills company, which allowed the team to test dehydrated food
9 that it was developing for the Apollo space program; and

10 WHEREAS, the first attempt departed on March 18, 1967
11 from Ellesmere island, Canada, six hundred miles from the
12 north pole; and

13 WHEREAS, none of the men had set foot on Arctic ice,
14 and, after a month of travel, the team was trapped for a week
15 by a storm and forced to abandon the attempt several hundred
16 miles short of the pole, but which resulted in a Columbia
17 broadcasting system, incorporated, television documentary
18 entitled "To the Top of the World", by Charles Kuralt, who
19 had accompanied the expedition; and

20 WHEREAS, on March 7, 1968, the team departed again, this
21 time from Ward Hunt island, Canada, a four-hundred-twelve-
22 mile traverse to the north pole; and

23 WHEREAS, the team faced numerous obstacles, including
24 only five hours of daylight each day; polar bears; desolate
25 moonscapes of ice boulders; pack ice whose constant motion

1 created steep pressure ridges and stretches of open water
2 known as leads; and eerie sounds from the ice, including
3 ghoulish groans as ice floes shifted, followed by artillery-
4 like reports as the ice sheets collided and cracked,
5 threatening to open yawning fissures beneath their feet at
6 any moment; and

7 WHEREAS, the team was forced to zigzag through a
8 patchwork of pressure ridges, constantly at risk of breaking
9 through the frozen mantle to perish in the glacial sea
10 beneath; and

11 WHEREAS, the expedition reached its final camp on the
12 evening of April 18, 1968; and

13 WHEREAS, Gerald Pitzl, as the expedition navigator, made
14 hourly sextant sightings to confirm their location, and on
15 the morning of April 20, 1968, the expedition traveled the
16 final four miles to the pole and signaled a United States air
17 force C-130 weather reconnaissance aircraft; and

18 WHEREAS, the C-130 flew overhead confirming that the
19 team was located exactly at the north pole, and the pilot
20 radioed the team: "This is Lark 47 on approach to the North
21 Pole. I see them dead ahead. Four, three, two, one, North
22 Pole. Dead on. Every direction from where you fellows are
23 is south."; and

24 WHEREAS, a March 17, 2016 *New York Times Magazine*
25 article entitled "An Insurance Salesman and a Doctor Walk

1 Into a Bar, and End Up at the North Pole" renewed interest in
2 the expedition, and Sony pictures entertainment has
3 reportedly purchased the rights to make the story into a
4 feature-length film; and

5 WHEREAS, Gerald Pitzl is now the only living member of
6 the expedition and is a resident of Santa Fe, New Mexico; and

7 WHEREAS, Gerald Pitzl served as a professor of geography
8 at Macalester college in St. Paul, Minnesota, for thirty
9 years, then moved to New Mexico where he worked for the
10 public education department for nine years and the higher
11 education department for three years and is now retired; and

12 WHEREAS, Gerald Pitzl wrote in his diary, "We strive for
13 an elusive and imaginary point ... it has nothing to do with
14 the Arctic and the wilds of the north. It's the drive to
15 capture something that defies capture.";

16 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF
17 REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO that Gerald
18 "Jerry" Pitzl, Ph.D., be recognized and honored for his
19 significant achievement in reaching the north pole in 1968,
20 and that the governor be requested to proclaim April 20, 2018
21 "Gerald 'Jerry' Pitzl Day" in New Mexico; and

22 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this memorial be
23 transmitted to the governor and to Gerald "Jerry" Pitzl, Ph.D. HM 91