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HOUSE MEMORIAL 91

**53RD LEGISLATURE - STATE OF NEW MEXICO - SECOND SESSION, 2018**

INTRODUCED BY

Jason C. Harper and Brian Egolf

A MEMORIAL

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

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

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1           WHEREAS, the expedition team members were not experienced  
2 explorers, but ordinary men who endured temperatures that  
3 dipped to minus sixty-two degrees Fahrenheit and rarely rose  
4 above minus forty, and who suffered through two forty-mile-per-  
5 hour wind storms that confined them to their tents for a week  
6 at a time; and

7           WHEREAS, the team spent months preparing for the  
8 expedition, including sleeping on a frozen Minnesota lake and  
9 engineering ingenious clothing – an inner parka made of poplin  
10 with a wolverine fur hood layered underneath a duck canvas  
11 exterior parka, each dyed a different color so the men could  
12 identify each other in conditions of low visibility; and

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

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

20           WHEREAS, none of the men had set foot on Arctic ice, and,  
21 after a month of travel, the team was trapped for a week by a  
22 storm and forced to abandon the attempt several hundred miles  
23 short of the pole, but which resulted in a Columbia  
24 broadcasting system, incorporated, television documentary  
25 entitled "To the Top of the World", by Charles Kuralt, who had

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1 accompanied the expedition; and

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

5 WHEREAS, the team faced numerous obstacles, including only  
6 five hours of daylight each day; polar bears; desolate  
7 moonscapes of ice boulders; pack ice whose constant motion  
8 created steep pressure ridges and stretches of open water known  
9 as leads; and eerie sounds from the ice, including ghoulish  
10 groans as ice floes shifted, followed by artillery-like reports  
11 as the ice sheets collided and cracked, threatening to open  
12 yawning fissures beneath their feet at any moment; and

13 WHEREAS, the team was forced to zigzag through a patchwork  
14 of pressure ridges, constantly at risk of breaking through the  
15 frozen mantle to perish in the glacial sea beneath; and

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

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

23 WHEREAS, the C-130 flew overhead confirming that the team  
24 was located exactly at the north pole, and the pilot radioed  
25 the team: "This is Lark 47 on approach to the North Pole. I

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1 see them dead ahead. Four, three, two, one, North Pole. Dead  
2 on. Every direction from where you fellows are is south."; and

3 WHEREAS, a March 17, 2016 *New York Times Magazine* article  
4 entitled "An Insurance Salesman and a Doctor Walk Into a Bar,  
5 and End Up at the North Pole" renewed interest in the  
6 expedition, and Sony pictures entertainment has reportedly  
7 purchased the rights to make the story into a feature-length  
8 film; and

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

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

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

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

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