



2020 South Dakota Legislature

Senate Commemoration 809

Introduced by: **Senators** Schoenbeck, Blare, Bolin, Cammack, Castleberry, Curd, Duhamel, Ewing, Foster, Brock Greenfield, Heinert, Kennedy, Klumb, Kolbeck, Lake, Langer, Maher, Monroe, Nesiba, Novstrup, Ernie Otten, Partridge, Rusch, Schoenfish, V. J. Smith, Soholt, Stalzer, Steinhauer, Sutton, White, Wiik, Wismer, and Youngberg and **Representatives** Barthel, Anderson, Bartels, Borglum, Chaffee, Chase, Deutsch, Diedrich, Duvall, Finck, Frye-Mueller, Glanzer, Lana Greenfield, Gross, Hansen, Hunhoff, Johns, David Johnson, Mills, Milstead, Olson, Herman Otten, Perry, Kent Peterson, Rasmussen, Reed, Reimer, Rounds, Saba, and Wiese

1 **A LEGISLATIVE COMMEMORATION, To honor and commend the late Senator Gene**
 2 **Abdallah for his dedicated service to his community and state.**

3 WHEREAS, Gene Abdallah was born on July 16, 1936, in the Cathedral District of Sioux
 4 Falls, the youngest of nine children born to a Syrian-immigrant father. He attended Sioux
 5 Falls Cathedral Catholic High School and was a true Sioux Falls "Northender"; and

6 WHEREAS, Gene Abdallah served in the South Dakota Air National Guard from 1954 until
 7 his honorable discharge in 1962; he had already set himself on a path towards public service
 8 to South Dakota and our country; and

9 WHEREAS, Gene Abdallah was fortunate that Judy "Do-Da" Hansen smiled favorably upon
 10 his marriage proposal, and the two were married in Sioux Falls on January 17, 1959. From
 11 that blessed relationship, Gene and Do-Da raised three fine sons: Greg, Don, and Scott; and

12 WHEREAS, Gene Abdallah started his law enforcement career with the Minnehaha County
 13 Sheriff's Department in 1960, where he assisted in providing public safety to the citizens of
 14 Minnehaha County until 1969; and

15 WHEREAS, in March of 1982, Gene Abdallah accepted the call to service from President
 16 Ronald Reagan, and became South Dakota's 17th U.S. Marshal. Marshal Abdallah was
 17 reappointed by President Reagan in 1986 and appointed again by President George H.W. Bush
 18 in 1990. When Marshal Abdallah retired from the U.S. Marshal's service in 1994, he was one
 19 of the longest serving federal marshals in our nation's history; and

20 WHEREAS, while serving as U.S. Marshal, Gene Abdallah received the Meritorious Service
 21 Award, which is given to the top Marshals in the country. He was so beloved by his fellow
 22 Marshals that they nicknamed him "M.O.U."--"Marshal of the Universe." Gene's relationship

1 and respect within the U.S. Marshal's Service was epitomized by the annual U.S. Marshal
2 Pheasant Hunt that took place in South Dakota from the days of Gene's service as a U.S.
3 Marshal, up to and including this past year of his death; and

4 WHEREAS, Gene Abdallah's public service was not complete at this point, because he
5 accepted the appointment by Governor William Janklow in 1995 to serve as Superintendent
6 of the South Dakota Highway Patrol. Superintendent Abdallah served honorably in this
7 position from 1995 until 2000; and

8 WHEREAS, Gene Abdallah's dedication to the public was clear from his law enforcement
9 service, his charitable deeds even exceeded his law enforcement service. In the 1980s, Gene
10 Abdallah helped found the Christmas charity known as "Sioux Falls Cares." Through his
11 efforts, tens of thousands of dollars in food, clothing, and toys are distributed each year at
12 Christmas to needy families in the Sioux Falls area. Even more amazing is the Law
13 Enforcement Officers' Appreciation dinner that Gene started in 1982. The annual event is a
14 sellout and honors all forms of South Dakota law enforcement. The best speakers and most
15 famous public officials of the day are the annual keynote speakers at the event. The event
16 also serves as a charity that has raised millions of dollars for worthy causes in South Dakota;
17 and

18 WHEREAS, Gene Abdallah wasn't done with public service and ran for the South Dakota
19 Legislature in 2000. After serving one term in the South Dakota House of Representatives,
20 Gene Abdallah was elected to the State Senate in 2002. Gene served eight years in the State
21 Senate, serving as Chairman of the Judiciary Committee for most of that tenure. Gene later
22 served two additional years in the House of Representatives. In each of these legislative races,
23 Gene Abdallah received more votes than any other candidate in the state. Gene Abdallah left
24 an indelible imprint on the laws of South Dakota in the area of driving-under-the-influence
25 enforcement, combatting domestic abuse, and dealing with sexual predators. The citizens of
26 South Dakota will be forever in debt for his service in the legislature; and

27 WHEREAS, in spite of all his many accomplishments in the public arena, the greatest joy
28 in Gene Abdallah's life came from his relationship with his beloved Do-Da, his three sons, and
29 his five amazing grandchildren. Gene thought his granddaughter Grace's name defined her.
30 He reveled in his grandson John's activities, particularly when John saw the light and returned
31 to the Twins. Gene loved his granddaughter Brooke--he particularly enjoyed kidding her about
32 being the chairman of the Lawrence County Democrats--"all three of them," he would say.
33 Gene was extremely proud of his granddaughter Sydney's Arabic studies, and that she was

1 following her uncle Scott's path in the practice of law. Finally, Collin's tremendous athletic
2 accomplishments gave his grandfather much to speak of; and

3 WHEREAS, thousands of South Dakotans called Gene Abdallah "friend." He prided himself
4 in needling his friends and acting like a curmudgeon when in reality he had a heart as big as
5 the universe. If Gene Abdallah never hung up on you or called you a "dummy," then you
6 never really knew him as a friend. He so enjoyed the act of being a curmudgeon that he used
7 to say he only needed to keep six friends, to carry him at his funeral. At one point, he decided
8 he was going to be cremated, and then he decided he only needed to keep one friend. In
9 reality, for the thousands that knew and loved him, we knew there was nothing he could do
10 about the inevitable size of the funeral that would memorialize his passing, and where he
11 would be honored with eulogies from the highest-ranking elected officials in South Dakota,
12 and a 21-gun salute from the South Dakota Highway Patrol; and

13 WHEREAS, on November 2, 2019, Do-Da lost her life's best friend, their family lost their
14 patriarch, and South Dakota lost one of its finest public servants:

15 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT COMMEMORATED, by the Ninety-Fifth Legislature of the State
16 of South Dakota, that the Legislature honors and commends Gene Abdallah for his dedicated
17 service to his community and state. May he rest in peace.