

# 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, Beal, Borglum, Chaffee, Chase, Deutsch, Diedrich, Duba, Duvall, Finck, Frye-Mueller, Glanzer, Goodwin, Lana Greenfield, Gross, Hansen, Healy, Hunhoff, Johns, David Johnson, Mills, Milstead, Olson, Herman Otten, Perry, Kent Peterson, Sue Peterson, Pischke, Rasmussen, Reed, Reimer, Rounds, Saba, Jamie Smith, St. John, Wiese, Willadsen, York, and Zikmund

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS, while serving as U.S. Marshal, Gene Abdallah received the Meritorious Service Award, which is given to the top Marshals in the country. He was so beloved by his fellow Marshals that they nicknamed him "M.O.U."--"Marshal of the Universe." Gene's relationship and respect within the U.S. Marshal's Service was epitomized by the annual U.S. Marshal Pheasant Hunt that took place in South Dakota from the days of Gene's service as a U.S. Marshal, up to and including this past year of his death; and

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

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

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

WHEREAS, in spite of all his many accomplishments in the public arena, the greatest joy in Gene Abdallah's life came from his relationship with his beloved Do-Da, his three sons, and his five amazing grandchildren. Gene thought his granddaughter Grace's name defined her. He reveled in his grandson John's activities, particularly when John saw the light and returned to the Twins. Gene loved his granddaughter Brooke--he particularly enjoyed kidding her about being the chairman of the Lawrence County Democrats--"all three of them," he would say. Gene was extremely proud of his granddaughter Sydney's Arabic studies, and that she was following her uncle Scott's path in the practice of law. Finally, Collin's tremendous athletic accomplishments gave his grandfather much to speak of; and

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

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

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

