

2009-J591

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION paying tribute to the life and accomplishments of Constance Eberhardt Cook, former New York State Assemblywoman; first female vice president at Cornell University; and author of the law that legalized abortion in New York State, three years before it became legal across the Nation

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to honor the lives of those esteemed individuals of world renown who distinguished themselves through their life's work; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern, and in full accord with its long-standing traditions, this Legislative Body is justly proud to pay tribute to the life and accomplishments of Constance Cook, Assemblymember, activist, and legal crusader for women's rights; and

WHEREAS, Constance Cook was best known for having passed in the Assembly on April 10, 1970, the abortion rights law that she wrote with State Senator Franz S. Leichter, which legalized abortion for women in New York State three years before the Supreme Court decision Roe v. Wade legalized it throughout the country; and

WHEREAS, Constance Cook died on Tuesday, January 20, 2009, at the age of 89; and

WHEREAS, Constance Cook was appointed to the chair of the Assembly's Education Committee in 1969, becoming the first woman to head a major committee of the New York State legislature; and

WHEREAS, Constance Cook served from 1962 to 1974 as the representative in the New York State Assembly of the 128th District, which then included Tompkins, Yates and Seneca Counties, and was known as an active proponent of the expansion of the State University system; and

WHEREAS, Constance Cook graduated from Cornell in 1941, and earned her law degree there in 1943, after which she went to work at a Wall Street

law firm; she moved to Ithaca five years later and became a legal assistant to Assemblyman Ray S. Ashberry, whose Assembly seat she successfully ran for when he retired; and

WHEREAS, Constance Cook successfully advocated for the Reverend Betty Bone Schiess, one of 11 women who has been ordained to the Episcopal priesthood by reformist bishops, and whom Bishop Ned Cole of the Diocese of Central New York refused to license; and

WHEREAS, Constance Cook took Reverend Schiess's case to the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which ruled in Reverend Schiess's favor; the General Convention of the church then passed a resolution in July 1976, declaring that "no one shall be denied access" to ordination on the basis of sex; and

WHEREAS, A true hero to the women of New York and to fair-minded people everywhere, who engaged in her work with both great wit and extraordinary kindness, Constance Cook is survived by a daughter, Catherine; a son, John; a sister, Marjorie Haupt; and three grandchildren; her husband, Alfred, died in 1998; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to pay tribute to the extraordinary life and accomplishments of Constance Cook, Assemblymember, activist, and legal crusader for women's rights; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the family of Constance Cook.