

SCR 209 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY**Carrier:** Sen. Knopp**Senate Committee On Rules**

Action Date: 02/29/24
Action: Do adopt.
Vote: 4-0-1-0
Yeas: 4 - Knopp, Lieber, Manning Jr, Steiner
Exc: 1 - Hansell
Fiscal: No fiscal impact
Revenue: No revenue impact
Prepared By: Leslie Porter, LPRO Analyst
Meeting Dates: 2/29

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

The measure celebrates the life and accomplishments of Joanne Russell Verger (1930-2023), recognizes and honors her contributions to the people of Oregon, and expresses a deep sense of loss with the entire Capitol community.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Joanne Verger's character, influence, and legacy
- Her career, determination, grace, dignity, and strength
- Her reputation and a "velvet hammer"

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

Joanne Russell Verger was born in Amite, Louisiana, on July 19, 1930, to Robert Weldon Russell and Nannie Claire Russell (Lingo). As the last of four children, Joanne Verger's upbringing in the throes of the Great Depression left an indelible mark on her life. Growing up in the Deep South contributed to a rich and full childhood that she would recall fondly later in life. Her grandfather was a Methodist minister, and he imprinted on her a devout sense of faith, modesty, and incredible spiritual and personal discipline.

Joanne Verger was an excellent student in high school and graduated at the age of 16. After high school, she enrolled at Northwestern State College in Louisiana, where she excelled as a thespian and Shakespearean actress, starring as Helena in A Midsummer Night's Dream.

While in college, she reconnected with her childhood friend Lawton, whom she first met when she was in third grade. Joanne and Lawton Verger were married on November 19, 1950. They later moved to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where Lawton took a job as a Pontiac salesman. They welcomed their first child, Kathy, in 1952, followed by their sons Jim and John in 1955 and 1957, and their daughter Anne Adair in 1960. In 1969, Joanne and Lawton Verger moved to Coos Bay, Oregon, where they took ownership of an automobile dealership.

Joanne Verger became the tourism director for the City of Coos Bay and later helped create the Bay Area Fun Festival and the Blackberry Arts Festival. She won a seat on the Coos Bay City Council in 1990 and was elected the City of Coos Bay's first female mayor in 1992. Joanne Verger was elected to the Oregon Legislative Assembly in 2000, where she served as a member of the House of Representatives from 2001 to 2005 and as a member of the Senate from 2005 to 2013.

Joanne Verger was a tireless advocate for her community and a champion for rural Oregonians everywhere. She represented the true spirit of bipartisanship, working across party lines to create a better Oregon, and served the

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State of Oregon with dignity, honesty, kindness, and resolve. She wrote two books, *Dancing with the Daffodils* and *Moonlight on the Pond*, reflecting on her childhood memories in the Deep South.

Joanne Verger passed away at the age of 93 on September 22, 2023. She is survived by her four children and their spouses, Jim and Diane Verger, Kathy and Jerry Muscus, Anne Johnson, and John and Yvette Verger; her four grandchildren, Aaron Johnson, Logan Reeder, James Verger, and Nissa Thompson; and her great-grandchild, Alexandra Verger.