

Senate Resolution 117 - Introduced

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 117

BY COSTELLO

1 A Resolution celebrating and recognizing the many
2 accomplishments of Dr. Peggy Whitson.

3 WHEREAS, Peggy Annette Whitson, who was born in
4 Mount Ayr, Iowa, and grew up on a family farm near
5 Beaconsfield, was initially inspired to be a space
6 explorer at the age of nine watching Neil Armstrong and
7 Buzz Aldrin take their first steps on the moon; and

8 WHEREAS, after raising and selling chickens as
9 a young girl to afford flying lessons and obtain
10 her private pilot's license, she became even more
11 resolute in her determination to be an astronaut
12 when, in the same year she graduated from Mount Ayr
13 Community High School, the National Aeronautics and
14 Space Administration (NASA) accepted its first class
15 of female astronauts including Sally Ride, the first
16 American woman in space; and

17 WHEREAS, following high school, Dr. Whitson designed
18 her education goals to be consistent with working at
19 NASA, by receiving her bachelor of science degree
20 in biology and chemistry from Iowa Wesleyan College
21 in 1981, and, declining advice to attend medical
22 school rather than follow her dream, by receiving her
23 doctorate in biochemistry from Rice University in
24 1985; and

25 WHEREAS, after receiving her PhD and completing a
26 fellowship, Dr. Whitson soon joined the NASA Johnson
27 Space Center as a National Research Council Resident
28 Research Associate, then as a Research Biochemist

1 in the Biomedical Operations and Research Branch,
2 and subsequently held a number of senior positions,
3 concurrently, including Project Scientist of the
4 Shuttle-Mir Program, Deputy Division Chief of the
5 Medical Sciences Division, and Co-Chair of the
6 U.S.-Russian Mission Science Working Group; and

7 WHEREAS, after applying for the astronaut program
8 five times over the course of 10 years, she was
9 selected as an astronaut candidate in 1996 attributing
10 her selection, in part, to both an extensive background
11 in science and cooperative work with Russian and other
12 international space colleagues; and

13 WHEREAS, Dr. Whitson first flew into space on June
14 5, 2002, as a flight engineer for Expedition 5, docking
15 at the International Space Station on June 7, 2002; and

16 WHEREAS, during her over 184 days in space with that
17 mission, she was named the first NASA Science Officer,
18 conducted 21 investigations in human life sciences and
19 microgravity sciences as well as commercial payloads,
20 grew the first crop of soybeans in space, and performed
21 a more-than four-hour spacewalk, before returning to
22 Earth with her two Russian cosmonaut colleagues on
23 December 7, 2002; and

24 WHEREAS, Dr. Whitson subsequently was a member of
25 the Expedition 16 crew that launched from Kazakhstan
26 on October 10, 2007, and included a Russian cosmonaut
27 and a Malaysian spaceflight participant, docked at the
28 International Space Station on October 12, 2007, and
29 returned to Earth after 192 days in space on April 19,
30 2008; and

1 WHEREAS, during that mission, Dr. Whitson was
2 Station Commander, supervised the most complex
3 expansion of the station's living and working space
4 in more than six years, performed five spacewalks
5 to conduct assembly and maintenance tasks, and
6 welcomed rotating crew members through several shuttle
7 flights; and

8 WHEREAS, Dr. Whitson most recently launched on
9 November 17, 2016, as part of Expedition 50/51/52
10 and returned safely to Earth on September 3, 2017,
11 during which mission Dr. Whitson contributed to
12 hundreds of experiments in biology, biotechnology,
13 physical science, and Earth science, welcomed
14 several cargo spacecraft, grew and harvested Chinese
15 cabbage, and conducted six, and participated in four,
16 spacewalks; and

17 WHEREAS, when Dr. Whitson's most recent mission
18 ended in September 2017, she had spent over 289 days in
19 orbit, more than any other female astronaut in a single
20 space flight; and

21 WHEREAS, Dr. Whitson has spent more time living and
22 working in space cumulatively than any other American
23 or any woman worldwide, spending over 665 days over
24 three different missions aboard the International Space
25 Station earning her the nickname "Space Ninja" and the
26 Twitter handle "@AstroPeggy"; and

27 WHEREAS, Dr. Whitson has broken many other barriers
28 and set many other records including completing 10
29 spacewalks and logging 60 hours and 21 minutes walking
30 in space, more than any other woman in the world;

1 being the first woman and nonmilitary Chief of the
2 Astronaut Office; being the first woman to command the
3 International Space Station, and the only woman to do
4 so twice; and being the oldest woman in space and the
5 oldest woman spacewalker (not a goal she was shooting
6 for, she says); and

7 WHEREAS, even though Dr. Whitson has been a leader
8 and a trailblazer and has earned accolades throughout
9 her lifetime too numerous to mention, she remains true
10 to her Iowa roots, having taken her Mount Ayr Community
11 High School t-shirt with her on her first space flight
12 and having acknowledged that "My work ethic is, I
13 think, from my farm life. My parents are the hardest
14 working people I ever knew, they always worked every
15 day, all day, they had to come up with the solutions
16 to make things work. And I think that work ethic,
17 maybe stubbornness, single-mindedness, definitely
18 played a role for me. I'm definitely thankful for my
19 roots."; and

20 WHEREAS, those Iowa roots, Iowa stubbornness, and
21 the things her parents, Keith and Beth Whitson, taught
22 her, that you can do whatever you set your mind to and
23 that there is nothing No. 2 wire, pliers, and a healthy
24 attitude cannot repair — especially when a solar array
25 rips on the International Space Station and all you
26 have on hand is a makeshift bit of sheet metal — have
27 served her well; and

28 WHEREAS, for all of her time in space, Dr. Whitson
29 remains down-to-earth and reluctant to be called a role
30 model, describing her bio simply as: Peggy Whitson:

1 Astronaut; and

2 WHEREAS, this ability to stay grounded and to
3 appreciate the important things in life is evidenced by
4 the fact that, being married since 1989 to her husband
5 Dr. Clarence F. Sams, a NASA biochemist and director
6 of the Cell and Molecular Research Laboratory, she has
7 chosen always to take into space her most important
8 personal possession, her wedding ring, and by her
9 acknowledgment that the two things that beckon her back
10 to earth are real (not freeze-dried) pizza and her
11 husband (in that order); and

12 WHEREAS, whether Dr. Whitson participates in another
13 space flight in the future, her enduring legacy,
14 especially for women, is best described by other
15 female astronauts as one of having removed gender from
16 the conversation so that female astronauts are just
17 expected to perform like everyone else and as having
18 opened the door for people to realize that women can
19 lead, make critical decisions, and take command; and

20 WHEREAS, when named one of Glamour's Women of the
21 Year in 2017, Dr. Whitson encouraged the girls and
22 young women in the audience from the Lower East Side
23 Girls Club and other nonprofit groups to achieve their
24 dreams with these words: "...number one, find your
25 passion, because with that passion you can do anything.
26 And number two, work for it. Make it happen. It's not
27 going to get handed to you... And number three, you
28 need to live a little bit outside your comfort zone,
29 because you can be even more than you dream of."; and

30 WHEREAS, Dr. Whitson was featured on the March 2018

1 cover of National Geographic magazine and will be
2 presented with the Robert D. Ray Pillar of Character
3 Award on April 13, 2018, an award recognizing a person
4 who demonstrates good character as a role model and
5 commitment to civility and character development; NOW
6 THEREFORE,

7 BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE, That the Senate
8 congratulates Dr. Peggy Whitson on her remarkable
9 lifetime of accomplishments; commends Dr. Whitson for
10 her outstanding contributions to the development of
11 international cooperation and for exemplifying that
12 successful endeavors require the teamwork of those
13 with diverse skills and backgrounds and relationships
14 built on mutual trust and respect, whether on the
15 International Space Station or on Earth; and thanks Dr.
16 Whitson for steadfastly promoting interest in STEM and
17 inspiring both girls and boys, no matter the size of
18 their hometown, to dream big, work hard, and reach for
19 the (moon and) stars.