



SR1365

LRB101 22110 LAW 73133 r

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SENATE RESOLUTION

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WHEREAS, The members of the Illinois Senate are saddened to learn of the death of Louis Ray "Lou" Henson, who passed away on July 25, 2020; and

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WHEREAS, Lou Henson was born to Joe Henson and Lora Faye Falconer Henson on January 10, 1932; he grew up on a small farm near Okay, Oklahoma; he played basketball at Okay High School, Connors State College, and New Mexico A&M; and

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WHEREAS, Lou Henson pursued a coaching career after college; he served as a graduate assistant to his mentor Presley Askew; he later earned his master's degree and was offered a coaching job and a mathematics teaching position at Las Cruces High School (LCHS) in Las Cruces, New Mexico; after two years, he became the head coach while still teaching multiple math classes; his LCHS teams won three consecutive New Mexico State High School Championships; and

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WHEREAS, Lou Henson was offered the head coach position at Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas; before accepting, he met with the Board of Trustees and noted that he would not accept the job until the school was integrated as there were no African Americans on campus either as student-athletes or faculty members at that time; after the board met overnight and

1 agreed to integrate, he launched his college coaching career at
2 the age of 30; and

3 WHEREAS, After coaching and serving as the athletic
4 director three of the four years, Lou Henson was offered the
5 head coaching position at his alma mater, New Mexico State
6 University; within two years, he assumed the role of athletic
7 director in addition to the head basketball coach position; he
8 managed both jobs while playing a key role in the construction
9 of the Pan American Center, a 13,000-seat multipurpose arena;
10 he led the New Mexico State University Aggies to the Final Four
11 in 1970, where they finished third; and

12 WHEREAS, Lou Henson began coaching at the University of
13 Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1975; alongside his assistants
14 Tony Yates and Les Wothke, he made it a priority to visit every
15 high school in the State in order to foster positive
16 relationships with Illinois high school basketball coaches;
17 during that first year, he and his staff visited more than 400
18 high schools; and

19 WHEREAS, Lou Henson's efforts returned the University of
20 Illinois basketball program to prominence, which culminated
21 with the 1989 Final Four Flyin' Illini; his team was seldom
22 outhustled or outworked; his Flyin' Illini were considered one
23 of the most entertaining teams in collegiate basketball

1 history, capturing the hearts of Illini Nation and basketball
2 fans everywhere; he retired from the University of Illinois in
3 1996 as the school's all-time winningest coach with 423
4 victories in 21 seasons; and

5 WHEREAS, Lou Henson returned to the New Mexico State
6 University basketball program in the fall of 1997; after
7 discussing the matter with his wife Mary, he consented to only
8 coach for six months and stipulated that he receive no salary;
9 at his request, New Mexico State University paid him one dollar
10 per month to coach the Aggies for the first year, with his net
11 pay being the grand sum of 75 cents; he was persuaded to
12 continue coaching at New Mexico State University for the next
13 six years; and

14 WHEREAS, Lou Henson has the distinction of being the coach
15 with the most wins at both New Mexico State University and the
16 University of Illinois; he was entered into the sports halls of
17 fame at both universities, and their floors were named after
18 him; he is also one of a handful of coaches that have guided
19 two different teams to the Final Four; he was selected as a
20 member of the NCAA Basketball Hall of Fame on February 17,
21 2015; and

22 WHEREAS, Lou Henson was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer in
23 2003; he started aggressive treatment at Carle Cancer Center

1 and MD Anderson Cancer Center; although his cancer was in
2 remission, he contracted viral encephalitis one year later; he
3 was treated at the MountainView Regional Medical Center and
4 later at the Texas Rehabilitation Center; he returned home in a
5 wheelchair due to paralysis and other trauma; although he
6 worked tirelessly to walk again, the encephalitis impacted his
7 balance; by last count, he had fallen over 150 times with only
8 one serious injury; he never complained about any of his health
9 issues; he was thankful to have survived the cancer and
10 encephalitis and incredibly grateful for his health care
11 providers; and

12 WHEREAS, Lou Henson is synonymous with University of
13 Illinois basketball as it is impossible to discuss the
14 university's basketball program without mentioning him; he was
15 a coach who based his programs on strict discipline, which many
16 of his former players credit for the success they achieved
17 after their playing days; his humble demeanor, kindness, and
18 tremendous character will never be forgotten; and

19 WHEREAS, Lou Henson was preceded in death by his son, Louis
20 Ray Henson Jr.; and

21 WHEREAS, Lou Henson is survived by his wife of 65 years,
22 Mary Catherine Brantner Henson; his three daughters, Lori Jo
23 Henson, Lisa Rose (John) Rutter, and Leigh Anne (Coit) Edison;

1 his 12 grandchildren; his seven great-grandchildren; and his
2 numerous nieces and nephews; therefore, be it

3 RESOLVED, BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED FIRST GENERAL
4 ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that we mourn the passing of
5 Louis Ray "Lou" Henson and extend our sincere condolences to
6 his family, friends, and all who knew and loved him; and be it
7 further

8 RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be
9 presented to the family of Lou Henson as an expression of our
10 deepest sympathy.