



SR1068

LRB100 15499 ALS 30523 r

1

SENATE RESOLUTION

2

WHEREAS, The members of the Illinois Senate are saddened to learn of the death of Robert Guillaume of Los Angeles, California, who passed away on October 24, 2017; and

3

4

5

WHEREAS, Robert Guillaume was born Robert Peter Williams in St. Louis to Zoe Bertha Edwards on November 30, 1927; he was raised by his grandmother, Jeanette Williams; he attended a Roman Catholic high school, where he sang in the choir; he joined the United States Army in 1945 and was honorably discharged in 1947; he then enrolled at St. Louis University to study business on the G.I. Bill; he later studied singing and theater at Washington University in St. Louis; he married Marlene Scott in 1955 and they later divorced; he married Donna Brown in 1985; and

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

WHEREAS, Robert Guillaume moved to Cleveland to play Billy Bigelow in the musical "Carousel" at Karamu House, a historically black theater, in the 1950s; it was there that he adopted the surname Guillaume, which was inspired by his grandfather's tales of his family's French heritage; he left Cleveland to tour with the musical "Free and Easy"; soon afterward, he moved to New York, and his stage career flourished; and

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

1 WHEREAS, Robert Guillaume acted in several plays,
2 including a revival of "Porgy and Bess," a Broadway revival of
3 "Purlie," and the musical revue "Jacques Brel is Alive and Well
4 and Living in Paris"; he also starred in the Los Angeles
5 production of "The Phantom of the Opera" and an all-black
6 Broadway revival of "Guys and Dolls"; and

7 WHEREAS, Robert Guillaume landed the part of Benson in
8 "Soap" in 1977; his portrayal of a black domestic worker with a
9 sharp tongue and dignified mien earned him an Emmy Award for
10 best supporting actor in a comedy series in 1979; after his
11 Emmy win, Guillaume's character, Benson, got his own series,
12 and he won an Emmy Award for outstanding lead actor in a comedy
13 series; that same year, he also portrayed the Reverend Dr.
14 Martin Luther King Jr. in "Prince Jack" and the abolitionist
15 Frederick Douglass in the television miniseries "North and
16 South"; two short-lived television shows followed, "The Robert
17 Guillaume Show" and "Pacific Station"; he later went on to a
18 role in Aaron Sorkin's "Sports Night"; and

19 WHEREAS, Robert Guillaume, along with his wife Donna,
20 founded the Confetti Entertainment Company, which created
21 read-along books for children with his voice as the narrator;
22 this marked the beginning of a voice career, and he was cast as
23 Rafiki in "The Lion King"; he went on to play Rafiki in the
24 sequels and won a Grammy Award for his narration of a

1 read-along book in "The Lion King" series; the Confetti
2 Entertainment books were transformed into the HBO series
3 "Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales for Every Child," with
4 Guillaume retelling classical fairy tales with a multicultural
5 focus; and

6 WHEREAS, After suffering a stroke in 1999, Robert Guillaume
7 became an advocate for health awareness, encouraging people to
8 know the symptoms of a stroke and to get their blood pressure
9 and cholesterol tested regularly; he traveled as a spokesman
10 for the American Stroke Association and made appearances for
11 the American Heart Association; and

12 WHEREAS, Robert Guillaume's television career was diverse
13 and spanned many decades; his penchant for playing
14 distinguished characters resolutely defied racial stereotypes;
15 and

16 WHEREAS, Robert Guillaume was preceded in death by his son,
17 Jacques; and

18 WHEREAS, Robert Guillaume is survived by his wife, Donna;
19 his daughters, Patricia Carpenter and Melissa and Rachel
20 Guillaume; his son, Kevin; his four grandchildren; his five
21 great-grandchildren; and his one great-great-granddaughter;
22 therefore, be it

1 RESOLVED, BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDREDTH GENERAL
2 ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that we mourn the passing of
3 Robert Guillaume and extend our sincere condolences to his
4 friends, family, and all who knew and loved him; and be it
5 further

6 RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be
7 presented to the family of Robert Guillaume as an expression of
8 our deepest sympathy.