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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 "Lou" Ray 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 near Okay, Oklahoma on January 10, 1932; he played basketball at Okay High School, Connors State College, and New Mexico A&M; and

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WHEREAS, Inspired by his coaches, Lou Henson pursued a career in coaching; after college, he served as graduate assistant to his mentor, Connors State College Basketball Coach Presley Askew, and was offered the "B" team coaching job and a mathematics teaching position at Las Cruces High after earning his master's degree; 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 a fourth year saw them in the quarterfinals; and

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WHEREAS, In 1962, Hardin Simmons University (Division I at that time) in Abilene, Texas offered Lou Henson the head coach position; before accepting, he met with the school's board and explained that he would not accept the job until the school was integrated; the board met overnight and agreed to integrate,

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1 launching his college coaching career at age 30; achieving
2 integration at Hardin Simons University was one of the proudest
3 moments of his career; and

4 WHEREAS, After coaching and serving as athletic director at
5 Hardin Simmons University for a few years, Lou Henson was
6 offered the head coaching position at his alma mater, New
7 Mexico State University; in their very first season, the Aggies
8 drew national attention by twice defeating the defending NCAA
9 champions, Texas Western (UTEP), as well as the third-ranked
10 New Mexico Lobos; within two years, he assumed the role of
11 athletic director in addition to the head basketball job; he
12 managed both jobs while playing a key role in the construction
13 of the Pan American Center, a 13,000-seat multipurpose arena;
14 in 1970, he led the Aggies to the Final Four, finishing third
15 after being defeated by defending champions UCLA; and

16 WHEREAS, Lou Henson began coaching at the University of
17 Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1975; he retired from the
18 University of Illinois in 1996 as the school's most successful
19 coach with 423 victories in 21 seasons; his vision to rebuild
20 the Illinois program was made possible through the hard work
21 and dedication of his assistant coaches, Dick Nagy, Jimmy
22 Collins, and Mark Coomes; returning the Illinois basketball
23 program to prominence culminated with the 1989 Final Four
24 Flyin' Illini; many believe that this team would have won the

1 national title had it not been for player injuries during the
2 tournament; the Flyin' Illini were considered one of the most
3 entertaining teams in collegiate basketball history and
4 captured the hearts of Illini Nation and basketball fans
5 everywhere; and

6 WHEREAS, In the fall of 1997, Lou Henson once again assumed
7 leadership of the New Mexico State University basketball
8 program; at his request, New Mexico State paid him only one
9 dollar per month to coach the Aggies; he coached at NMSU for
10 the next six years, after initially securing his wife Mary's
11 approval to coach for "only six months"; and

12 WHEREAS, In 2003, Lou Henson was diagnosed with stage four
13 cancer; aggressive treatment was started, and although his
14 cancer was in remission, one year later he contracted viral
15 encephalitis; he was determined to return to the court, even if
16 he had to coach from his wheelchair; the day before he was
17 scheduled to take the court again, he was hospitalized with
18 pneumonia, which ultimately ended his coaching career; and

19 WHEREAS, Lou Henson kept physically active by swimming,
20 lifting weights, and walking; he enjoyed playing bridge, both
21 at home and at the local bridge center, gin, and checkers; as
22 his health declined, he remained a fierce competitor; and

1 WHEREAS, Lou Henson was preceded in death by his parents;
2 his son, Louis Ray Henson Jr.; and his siblings, Alma, Bill,
3 Jimmy Joe, J.D., and Donald; and

4 WHEREAS, Lou Henson is survived by his wife, Mary Catherine
5 Brantner Henson; his three daughters, Lori Jo Henson, Lisa Rose
6 (John) Rutter, and Leigh Anne (Coit) Edison; his siblings, Rose
7 and Kenneth; his 12 grandchildren; his seven
8 great-grandchildren; and his numerous nieces and nephews;
9 therefore, be it

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

15 RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be
16 presented to the family of Lou Henson as an expression of our
17 deepest sympathy.