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HOUSE RESOLUTION

2 WHEREAS, The members of the Illinois House of
3 Representatives are saddened to learn of the death of Louie
4 Bellson, who passed away on February 14, 2009; and

5 WHEREAS, Louie Bellson was born Luigi Paulino Alfredo
6 Francesco Antonio Balassoni in Rock Falls on July 6, 1924; his
7 father owned a music store, and he began playing drums at the
8 age of three; and

9 WHEREAS, Louie Bellson was a considerably talented drummer
10 by his teenage years; at the age of 17, he was picked by
11 popular drummer Gene Krupa as the winner of the Slingerland
12 National Gene Krupa contest, beating out thousands of other
13 young competitors; and

14 WHEREAS, Louie Bellson continued ascending through the
15 rank of the music industry as an adult; in the early 1950s, he
16 began performing in Duke Ellington's band, where he was often
17 granted a long drum feature, which he attacked with relish and
18 poise; he also wrote compositions like "The Hawk Talks" and
19 "Skin Deep" that were regularly performed by the band; in 1965,
20 he participated in Ellington's first Sacred Concert; he always
21 proudly maintained that Duke Ellington had called him the
22 world's greatest drummer; and

1 WHEREAS, Prior to joining Ellington's band, Louie Bellson
2 performed with the orchestras of Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey,
3 and Harry James; he later worked briefly with Count Basie and
4 Ella Fitzgerald; he also appeared in combos with all-stars like
5 the trumpeters Roy Eldridge and Dizzy Gillespie, the alto
6 saxophonist Benny Carter, and the pianists Art Tatum and Oscar
7 Peterson during his regular stints on Norman Granz's Jazz at
8 the Philharmonic tours in the 1950s; and

9 WHEREAS, Louie Bellson led numerous bands of his own for
10 many decades, leading small groups as well as ensembles,
11 including the Big Band Explosion; in 1969, his band was chosen
12 to back James Brown on "Soul on Top"; he created his own label,
13 Percussion Power, on which he released "The Sacred Music of
14 Louie Bellson & the Jazz Ballet," which included a big band,
15 strings, and a choir, in 2006; his most recent album, "Louie &
16 Clark Expedition 2", was released in 2008; and

17 WHEREAS, Louie Bellson gained a reputation throughout the
18 music world as a dynamic, spectacular soloist known for his use
19 of two bass drums, a technique he pioneered as a teenager; he
20 was also known for his attentiveness and precision, which made
21 him a highly successful sideman, and his subtlety; and

22 WHEREAS, Louie Bellson was a prolific composer, who

1 performed and recorded a number of his own pieces; he sometimes
2 branched beyond swing music to compose orchestral and choral
3 work; in his later years, he was a tireless educator and
4 clinician who nurtured generations of young musicians,
5 particularly fellow drummers; and

6 WHEREAS, Louie Bellson was the recipient of numerous honors
7 for his work, including a Jazz Masters Award from the National
8 Endowment for the Arts and a Living Jazz Legend Award from the
9 John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts; he was also
10 designated an ASCAP Jazz Living Legend by the American Society
11 of Composers, Authors and Publishers; and

12 WHEREAS, In 1952, Louie Bellson married hit singer and
13 actress Pearl Bailey; shortly after their marriage, he became
14 her bandleader; Ms. Bailey passed away in 1990; he is survived
15 by Francine Bellson, his second wife and manager; and

16 WHEREAS, Louie Bellson will be remembered by all who knew
17 and loved him as a drummer without equal, whose kindness and
18 compassion to world leaders and ardent fans alike endeared to
19 everyone he met; therefore, be it

20 RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
21 NINETY-SIXTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that we
22 mourn, along with his family, friends, and countless fans, the

1 passing of Louie Bellson; and be it further

2 RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be
3 presented to the family of Louie Bellson as an expression of
4 our sympathy.