

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 32

BY SENATORS ALARIO, ALLAIN, APPEL, BARROW, BISHOP, BOUDREAUX, CARTER, CHABERT, CLAITOR, COLOMB, CORTEZ, DONAHUE, ERDEY, FANNIN, GATTI, HEWITT, JOHNS, LAFLEUR, LAMBERT, LONG, LUNEAU, MARTINY, MILKOVICH, MILLS, MIZELL, MORRELL, MORRISH, PEACOCK, PERRY, PETERSON, PRICE, RISER, GARY SMITH, JOHN SMITH, TARVER, THOMPSON, WALSWORTH, WARD AND WHITE AND REPRESENTATIVES ABRAHAM, ABRAMSON, AMEDEE, ANDERS, ARMES, BACALA, BAGLEY, BAGNERIS, BARRAS, BERTHELOT, BILLIOT, BISHOP, BOUIE, BRASS, CHAD BROWN, TERRY BROWN, CARMODY, CARPENTER, GARY CARTER, ROBBY CARTER, STEVE CARTER, CHANEY, CONNICK, COUSSAN, COX, CREWS, CROMER, DANAHAY, DAVIS, DEVILLIER, DWIGHT, EDMONDS, EMERSON, FALCONER, FOIL, FRANKLIN, GAINES, GAROFALO, GISCLAIR, GLOVER, GUINN, HALL, JIMMY HARRIS, LANCE HARRIS, HAVARD, HAZEL, HENRY, HENSGENS, HILFERTY, HILL, HODGES, HOFFMANN, HOLLIS, HORTON, HOWARD, HUNTER, HUVAL, IVEY, JACKSON, JAMES, JEFFERSON, JENKINS, JOHNSON, JONES, JORDAN, NANCY LANDRY, TERRY LANDRY, LEBAS, LEGER, LEOPOLD, LYONS, MACK, MAGEE, MARCELLE, MARINO, MCFARLAND, MIGUEZ, DUSTIN MILLER, GREGORY MILLER, MORENO, JAY MORRIS, JIM MORRIS, NORTON, PEARSON, PIERRE, POPE, PUGH, PYLANT, REYNOLDS, RICHARD, SCHEXNAYDER, SEABAUGH, SHADOIN, SIMON, SMITH, STAGNI, STEFANSKI, STOKES, TALBOT, THIBAUT, THOMAS, WHITE, WRIGHT AND ZERINGUE

A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

To express the sincere condolences of the Legislature of Louisiana upon the passing of New Orleans businessman, philanthropist, and Louisiana legend, Thomas Milton "Tom" Benson, at the age of ninety and to note his lifetime of accomplishment.

WHEREAS, it is with great remorse that the Legislature of Louisiana and its people have learned of the passing of Tom Benson; an extraordinary gentleman and phenomenal businessman who experienced rags-to-riches success in life, who expressed gratitude for his good fortune by his participation in all manner of civic, social, and religious causes, and who always faced the world with a smile; and

WHEREAS, known as "Mr. B" and "Mr. New Orleans", Tom Benson had a larger-than-life public persona who acted as a goodwill ambassador for the city he loved, yet he was centered and down to earth in his private life; and

WHEREAS, a native son born in 1927 in the Seventh Ward, Tom was a child of the Depression and he quickly learned the value of hard work; and

WHEREAS, his work ethic reaped great success that culminated in a net worth estimated in the billions of dollars; Mr. Benson was the richest person in Louisiana and Forbes Magazine ranked his financial empire as 288th on its list of the 400 wealthiest Americans; and his empire began with a paper route while in grade school; and

WHEREAS, along with his prodigious work ethic, Tom Benson was a man of vision and creativity; he grasped the mechanics of finance, marketing, and demand, but he also had the keen ability to recognize the economic potential in lucrative situations; and

WHEREAS, he graduated from St. Aloysius, later known as Brother Martin High School, and from Loyola University with a degree in business administration; and

WHEREAS, his studies at Loyola were interrupted by his enlistment in the United States Navy during World War II, when he was assigned as a seaman aboard the USS South Dakota then honorably discharged at the conclusion of the conflict; and

WHEREAS, after graduation, he worked as an accountant to support his family, and in 1948 went to work as a bookkeeper at Cathey Chevrolet, the nexus of what would become his ownership of thirty-three car dealerships in Louisiana and Texas; and

WHEREAS, his astute business acumen expanded his holdings such as commercial real estate and the banking industry to form Benson Financial World and other venues; and

WHEREAS, in 1985, Mr. Benson purchased the New Orleans Saints football franchise; he made coaching and managerial changes that breathed new life into the team which led to its first winning season and playoff appearance in 1987, then winning the NFL XLIV Super Bowl (44th) on February 7, 2010, along with the special elation of being played on home turf in the Superdome; and the city of New Orleans has hosted five Super Bowls; and

WHEREAS, Saints football became his passion in later life and he kept an office at the training facility; Benson could be found viewing practice sessions from his golf cart; and

WHEREAS, Tom Benson was delighted to be inducted into the Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame in 2014 and a statue of his likeness holding up the Vince Lombardi Trophy stands on the plaza outside the Superdome; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Benson later purchased the NBA New Orleans Hornets basketball franchise in 2012, then changed its name to The Pelicans; ownership of both the Saints and Pelicans made Benson the only individual to own two major professional sports franchises in the same locale; and

WHEREAS, Tom Benson was the grateful recipient of a plethora of awards of every stripe for entrepreneurial, cultural, and philanthropic activities; he had a tenderness in his heart for those in need and without opportunities; and

WHEREAS, the establishment of the Gayle and Tom Benson Charitable Foundation provided endowments in benevolent endeavors; numerous public and nonprofit agencies benefitted from his generosity including local institutions of higher learning such as Loyola and Tulane universities, Ochsner medical center cancer research, New Orleans Museum of Art, the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation, the Audubon Nature Institute, the Boys and Girls Clubs of Southeast Louisiana, and numerous other charities benefitted from anonymous donations; and

WHEREAS, in acknowledgment of his generosity, Tom Benson was honored by the inclusion of his name associated with those entities he helped to develop or support, which include Notre Dame Seminary, Yulman Stadium at Tulane, the Tom Benson Jesuit Center at Loyola, Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium at the Pro Football Hall of Fame, the Science and Technology complex at St. Mary's Dominican High School, Team Gleason House (ALS advocacy), and in San Antonio, Texas, the School of Technology at Oblate School of Theology, the University of the Incarnate Word, and Central Catholic High School; and

WHEREAS, as a man of unfaltering faith, Tom Benson contributed to the support of many Roman Catholic entities and made extensive donations to educational institutions and charitable endeavors; and Tom and Gayle Benson were the recipients of the Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice medal from Pope Benedict XVI for their outstanding service to the Catholic Church, the highest papal honor bestowed to a Catholic layperson; and

WHEREAS, Tom Benson loved New Orleans and its rich culture and history; he

assisted in its rebuilding after Hurricane Katrina with investment in many worthwhile businesses; he bought a majority stake in the Dixie Brewing Company to revive the product and bring it back into production; and

WHEREAS, he was a Mardi Gras reveler without par, who celebrated the carnival season with great enthusiasm, and after Saints home victories in the Superdome, sporting a black and gold parasol, he sashayed down the football field to the music of "When the Saints Go Marching In" with a strut known as the "Benson Boogie"; and

WHEREAS, the people of the city of New Orleans expressed their high praise of Tom Benson in many ways, however, a touching tribute to him at the announcement of his passing was expressed in a "Second Line" impromptu parade of musicians, singers, and dancers who marched in reverence and celebration of his life through the French Quarter from Treme to the Superdome to the foot of his statute; and

WHEREAS, like "The Big Easy", Tom Benson worked hard and played hard, too; a quote from Tom Benson reads, "Tough times never last; but tough people do. Make no mistake, I will be back in the office tomorrow morning working hard, as I do every day"; that was the mantra of Tom Benson that lasted nearly a century; and

WHEREAS, Tom Benson made his fortune in football and finance; he was an extraordinarily tough and savvy businessman, an entrepreneur of the highest order; and he has left an indelible mark on the city of New Orleans and on the state, and whether the economic times were "boom or bust", he enjoyed every day and made the best of it going forward; and

WHEREAS, in nine decades of living, Tom Benson experienced unrivaled success; and like any man, he had his share of failure, contention, personal loss, and consolation; but no matter what the circumstance, Tom Benson and his wife, Gayle, always faced the world together, unafraid, and with a smile.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby express the sincere condolences upon the passing of Thomas Milton "Tom" Benson, New Orleans businessman, philanthropist, and Louisiana legend.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby note that a man of his stature, depth, and generosity shall not soon pass this way again.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be transmitted to his widow, Mrs. Gayle L. Benson.

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PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE

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SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES