



Office of the City Clerk

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Legislation Text

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OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

CITY OF CHICAGO

LORI E. LIGHTFOOT
MAYOR

October 7, 2020

TO THE HONORABLE, THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY
OF CHICAGO

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I transmit herewith a resolution honoring the life and memory of former Illinois governor James R. Thompson.

Your favorable consideration of this resolution will be appreciated.

Very truly yours,

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, The Members of this Body were saddened to learn of the death of Illinois' 37th Governor, James R. Thompson, on August 14, 2020 at the age of 84; and

WHEREAS, Illinois' longest-serving governor, leading Illinois from 1977 until 1991, "Big Jim" Thompson left a monumental legacy; and

WHEREAS, Jim Thompson was born on Chicago's West Side in 1936 and went to the University of Illinois' Chicago campus and Washington University in St. Louis, before earning his law degree from

Northwestern University. He became a prosecutor in the office of the Cook County State's Attorney in 1959 and argued more cases in the Supreme Court of Illinois than any lawyer other than Abraham Lincoln. In 1964, he became a professor of criminal law at Northwestern University School of Law; and

WHEREAS, Thompson moved to the staff of Illinois Attorney General William Scott in 1969 to head the Criminal Division. In 1971, he was named U.S. Attorney for Northern Illinois, serving until mid-1975. He grew the number of attorneys in that office and prosecuted a record number of official and police corruption cases; and

WHEREAS, In July, 1975, Thompson resigned as US Attorney and announced he would be a candidate for governor the following year. He was elected with close to 65 percent of the vote, the biggest gubernatorial win in Illinois since 1848. He focused closely on crime, creating the "Class X" level of felonies carrying longer sentences for violent crimes such as armed robbery and attempted murder; and

WHEREAS, In 1978, because of a change in the 1970 state Constitution, Thompson had to stand for a second term, just two years after winning his first. He again prevailed easily, winning with 59 percent of the vote. His second term coincided with a nationwide recession, and the Midwest "Rust Belt" was particularly hard hit. Thompson worked tirelessly to reverse the decline, leading the effort to build overseas export markets for Illinois products and encouraging foreign companies to invest in Illinois. One of his biggest successes was the decision by Diamond-Star Motors to build a joint Mitsubishi-Chrysler facility in Bloomington-Normal; and

WHEREAS, After winning a closely contested third term against U.S. Senator Adlai Stevenson III, Thompson proposed tax increases of close to \$2 billion, with hikes on gasoline and liquor as well as income taxes. Working with the Illinois General Assembly, Thompson ultimately won approval of some of those increases including a temporary income tax increase as well as higher gasoline taxes and approval of more state funding for mass transit in Chicago and highway maintenance downstate, followed by increases in education funding; and

WHEREAS, During his fourth term, Governor Thompson launched a major infrastructure improvement program called Build Illinois. Funded by bonds, Build Illinois led to \$2 billion in capital construction across the state, rebuilding public buildings, highways, bridges, park lodges, sewers and cultural centers. He also achieved another of his most successful

legislative wins: the vote in the closing hours of the 1988 General Assembly spring session to get the funding for a new stadium for the Chicago White Sox; and

WHEREAS, Governor Thompson was an informal leader and a fixture in the Springfield community, and the First Family was often seen around town, just like any other Springfield resident. He helped to open the Illinois State Fair by going down the giant slide in blue jeans. During a protracted debate of the State's right to work law, Thompson set up a beer tent on the Governor's Mansion's lawn and invited labor leaders over for a beer; and

WHEREAS, An admirer of the arts, Jim Thompson held an Antiques Fair every year on the Mansion's lawn. He not only required a small percentage of all public building contracts to be set aside for artwork, but also created the state's network of Illinois artisan shops. He was also a friend of historic preservation efforts

around the state, creating the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency and purchasing Frank Lloyd Wright's Dana Thomas house in Springfield for the State; and

WHEREAS, After leaving the governor's office in 1991, Thompson returned to practicing law, with the firm of Winston and Strawn in Chicago. He was picked by President George W. Bush in 2002 to be one of the members of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, better known as the 9/11 Commission; and

WHEREAS, Jim Thompson gave generously of time and talents to many other worthy causes, including serving as vice-chair of the Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission, chair of the National Governors Association, the Republican Governors Association, the Council of Great Lakes Governors, the President's National Intelligence Oversight Board, national co-chair of the Campaign to Protect Our Children, and as a member of the National Commission to Prevent Infant Mortality; and

WHEREAS, Jim Thompson generated widespread admiration and loyalty as a result of his extraordinary selflessness and skill at promoting and mentoring others. His impressive roster of proteges includes many legislators, a former White House Chief of Staff, a former US Secretary of Transportation, seven federal judges, three United States Attorneys, one Illinois Attorney General and four managing partners or chairs of leading Chicago law firms; and

WHEREAS, "Big Jim" Thompson will be remembered as a man who presided over state government during dramatically changing times, a governor who left a legacy of public works projects around the state, and a leader who represented an era when elected officials could put partisanship aside and reach agreements for the good of the people, now. therefore,

HE IT RESOLVED. That we, the Mayor and Members of the City Council of the City of Chicago, assembled this seventh day of October, 2020, do hereby extend our most heartfelt condolences to James R. Thompson's wife, .layne, his daughter, Samantha, and all of his family and friends; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be prepared and presented to the family of James R. Thompson as a sign of our honor and respect.