

2018 Regular Session

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 31

BY SENATORS ALARIO AND MARTINY

COMMENDATIONS. Commends, posthumously, former Jefferson Parish Sheriff Harry Lee for his contributions to the parish and the state of Louisiana.

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A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

To commend, posthumously, former Jefferson Parish Sheriff Harry Lee for his extraordinary life and contributions to Jefferson Parish and the state of Louisiana.

WHEREAS, it is appropriate that Harry Lee, one of the most famous politicians in Louisiana history and the second longest-serving Jefferson Parish sheriff, be commended and honored for his extraordinary life and significant contributions to Jefferson Parish and the state of Louisiana; and

WHEREAS, he was born in the back room of the family laundry business on Carondelet Street in New Orleans in 1932 into an immigrant family that spoke Chinese at home and were in a lonely minority in a Southern city that has never had a large Asian population; and

WHEREAS, he got a firsthand taste of politics early, at age twelve, when he was elected president of the newly formed student body government at Shaw Elementary School and was elected to class office each year thereafter; during his senior year at Francis T. Nicholls High School, he was president of both his senior class and the student body, a school first; and

WHEREAS, Harry Lee received a bachelor's degree in geology from Louisiana State University, did a short stint in the Air Force in Texas, and later served in the Louisiana Air

1 National Guard under the Judge Advocate's Office; and

2 WHEREAS, he returned to Louisiana in 1959, the same year that the family began
3 construction on the House of Lee; and

4 WHEREAS, he learned the art of politics from United States Representative
5 Hale Boggs and Boggs' widow, Lindy, who succeeded her husband in Congress, working
6 for six years as Hale Boggs' driver and confidant when the congressman was home in
7 Louisiana; and

8 WHEREAS, Harry Lee decided that public service was the career for him and that
9 law school was an entree so he enrolled and took classes at Loyola University School of Law
10 while working twelve-hour days at the family's restaurant; and

11 WHEREAS, after law school, he set up a small practice with classmate
12 Marion Edwards, later an appellate judge, and with Congressman Boggs' assistance,
13 Harry Lee was appointed the first magistrate for the United States District Court in New
14 Orleans in 1971 and, in 1976, became chief attorney for Jefferson Parish; and

15 WHEREAS, four years later, Harry Lee ran for and was elected to the office of
16 sheriff of Jefferson Parish serving in that capacity for over twenty-five years until his death
17 from leukemia on October 1, 2007, at age seventy-five, while in his seventh term as the chief
18 law enforcement officer of the parish; and

19 WHEREAS, as sheriff, Harry Lee was known as a zealous crime-fighter, often
20 credited for keeping the crime rate low in Jefferson Parish, and committed to ensuring public
21 safety; and

22 WHEREAS, upon taking over the sheriff's office, he computerized and modernized
23 office operation, enhanced the office so that a deputy arrived at a resident's house within five
24 minutes of an emergency call, and allowed deputies to take home marked sheriff's cars
25 ensuring that such cars were always visible around the parish; his office usually posted an
26 impressive homicide solve rate of more than ninety percent; and he oversaw an aggressive
27 strategy of tracking down and prosecuting career criminals; and

28 WHEREAS, he was considered controversial though as he stated "I think people like
29 me because I do a good job and because I tell it like it is", he once said, "If you ask me
30 something, I'll give you an answer, straight up. People may not like it, but I'm not going to

1 sugarcoat it"; and

2 WHEREAS, Sheriff Lee was also colorful, as at times he appeared in public in full
3 dress uniform with gold stars on the shoulders or wore his Sheriff's Office bomber jacket
4 while riding with his deputies on early morning drug raids; at public events, he often sported
5 a Stetson and custom-made cowboy boots with the Sheriff's Office emblem sewn into the
6 front; and

7 WHEREAS, Sheriff Lee was a fixture in Carnival parades, tossing plastic Sheriff's
8 Office badges and cups from a float bearing his own larger-than-life image, a giant paper
9 mache head that also briefly graced his campaign headquarters in the 1995 governor's race;
10 and

11 WHEREAS, he, on more than one occasion, sang at a popular West Bank
12 honky-tonk, Mud Bugs, and at the 1994 Jazz and Heritage Festival in New Orleans, took the
13 stage for a duet with his friend, Willie Nelson; and

14 WHEREAS, he was a voracious eater and an avid hunter who had a passion for the
15 outdoors, was committed to wildlife conservation, and had an exquisite collection of hand
16 carved decoys; and

17 WHEREAS, although he was never elected in any district larger than a single parish,
18 in 2001 he was inducted into the Louisiana Political Hall of Fame; and

19 WHEREAS, Sheriff Lee was survived by his wife, Lai Lee; a daughter,
20 Cynthia Sheng; and two grandchildren; and

21 WHEREAS, Harry Lee dedicated his life to the service of his family, parish, state,
22 and nation as a husband, father, soldier, attorney, magistrate, and sheriff.

23 THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby
24 commend, posthumously, Harry Lee; does hereby recognize and record for posterity his
25 contributions to Jefferson Parish and the state of Louisiana; and does hereby express the
26 enduring appreciation of his fellow citizens.

27 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be transmitted to the
28 family of Harry Lee.

The original instrument and the following digest, which constitutes no part of the legislative instrument, were prepared by Jerry J. Guillot.

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Commends, posthumously, former Jefferson Parish Sheriff Harry Lee for his extraordinary life and contributions to the parish and the state.