

Legislation Text

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Celebrating the life and honoring the memory of John Chaney, as we recognize his groundbreaking accomplishments in the sport of basketball and his many contributions to our beloved City.

WHEREAS, John Chaney was born in Jacksonville, Florida on January 21, 1932, spending his early years in a modest home in a low-lying, flood-prone area in the segregated, depression-era south; and

WHEREAS, During World War II, at a time when millions of Black families were migrating to northern cities, chasing opportunity and fleeing brutal oppression, John's stepfather moved his family to Philadelphia, where he found work in a defense plant; and

WHEREAS, John attended Philadelphia public schools and participated in their athletic programs, where he displayed an early gift for playing basketball and understanding the finer points of the game, and he was named Most Valuable Player in the public high school basketball league in 1951; and

WHEREAS, John attended Bethune-Cookman College, an HBCU, where in 1953 he was initiated into the Gamma Theta Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., and where his basketball performance earned him a place on the small-college all-American team. From there, after a brief stint with the Harlem Globetrotters, he joined the Eastern Professional Basketball League, playing for the Sunbury Mercuries, and later, the Williamsport Billies; and

WHEREAS, He first became Coach John Chaney in 1963, taking a position at what was then Sayre Junior High School in West Philadelphia, and in 1966, he became the coach at Simon Gratz High School. His teams had a combined record of 122 wins and 32 losses in nine seasons; and

WHEREAS, Coach Chaney's first collegiate job was at Cheyney State College, the nation's first HBCU, and a member of Division II of the National Collegiate Athletic Association ("NCAA"), where, in his ten seasons, the Wolves won 232 games and lost 56. In 1978, they won the Division II Men's Basketball Tournament; and

WHEREAS, Chaney became coach of the Division I Temple Owls in 1982, making him the first Black basketball coach in the Big Five. Over his 24 seasons, the Owls finished under .500 only once, won ten Atlantic 10 championships, and went to 17 NCAA Division I tournaments, advancing to the regional finals, also known as the "Elite Eight," five times; and

WHEREAS, Coach Chaney was known for demanding excellence from his players, both on- and off-court, and for the passion he often showed on the sidelines. His humble beginnings enabled him to see potential in young men with similar backgrounds when others did not, and he was deeply invested in the success of his players, in basketball and in life; and

WHEREAS, Coach Chaney was repeatedly recognized for his accomplishments, being named Atlantic 10 and NCAA coach of the year multiple times each, by several entities comprised of the basketball press. In addition, he was inducted into the Big Five Hall of Fame, the College Basketball Hall of Fame, and the Naismith

Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame; and

WHEREAS, Coach Chaney departed this life on Friday, January 29, 2021, at the age of 89, yet his legacy and spirit shall live in the words and deeds of the many people, from Philadelphia and beyond, whose lives he touched; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Does hereby celebrate the life and honor the memory of John Chaney, as we recognize his groundbreaking accomplishments in the sport of basketball and his many contributions to our beloved City.