

Legislation Text

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Honoring the life and legacy of Philadelphia's own "Smokin'" Joe Frazier on the 50th Anniversary of his heavyweight championship win over Muhammad Ali in the "Fight of the Century".

WHEREAS, "Smokin'" Joe Frazier was born on January 12, 1944 in Beaufort, South Carolina. At age 15, Frazier moved to New York to live with a brother. A year later he moved to Philadelphia, taking a job in a slaughterhouse. At times, he battered sides of beef, using them as a punching bag to train, which later inspired an acclaimed scene in the film *Rocky*; and

WHEREAS, From a young age, Frazier fell in love with the sport of boxing, wanting to follow in the footsteps of his favorite boxer, Joe Louis; and

WHEREAS, During Frazier's amateur career, he won Golden Glove heavyweight championships in 1962, 1963, and 1964. He also earned a gold medal at the 1964 Summer Olympics in Tokyo. He turned pro in August 1965, under trainer Yank Durham, who gave him the memorable moniker "Smokin' Joe," referring to smoke coming off of Frazier's boxing gloves. By winter 1968, his record was 21-0. Within three years, Smokin' Joe was fighting world-class opposition and in 1970, he beat Jimmy Ellis to win the heavyweight title that he would hold from February 16, 1970, until January 22, 1973; and

WHEREAS, On March 8, 1971, Frazier fought Muhammad Ali, in what was dubbed the "Fight of the Century," defeating Ali in the 15th round. That bout was Ali's first professional loss after 31 wins. For the first time in boxing history, the fight brought together two undefeated heavyweight champions fighting for the world championship; and

WHEREAS, "The Fight" is often called the greatest sporting event of the 20th century, and although it took place in New York City at Madison Square Garden, the roots of the saga are embedded in Philadelphia. Frazier trained in Philadelphia right across the Delaware River from Cherry Hill, New Jersey, where Muhammad Ali lived in March 1971; and

WHEREAS, The "Fight of the Century" was watched worldwide, with over 300 million around tuning in; and

WHEREAS, One of the iconic moments of the fight came when Ali famously taunted Frazier, "Joe, don't you know I'm God?" Frazier replied, "God, you're in the wrong place tonight"; and

WHEREAS, Ever since, Frazier has been consistently regarded as one of the greatest boxers in history. George Foreman, one of Frazier's great rivals, memorably commented on Frazier's legendary toughness that "he would not back up from King Kong"; and

WHEREAS, Frazier was not only an all-time great athlete, he was a devoted family man and citizen. His boxing gym in Philadelphia was a community hub and he mentored countless young fighters. For all the above reasons, his greatness is deserving of recognition as the world observes this historic anniversary; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby honors the life and legacy of Joe Frazier on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the “Fight of the Century” between Philadelphia native Joe Frazier and Muhammad Ali.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to the family of Joe Frazier as evidence of the sincere respect and admiration of this legislative body.