

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 883

WHEREAS, Legendary bull rider Willie Thomas of Booth was inducted into the Texas Rodeo Cowboy Hall of Fame at a ceremony in Temple on February 14, 2004; and

WHEREAS, A pioneer for African American cowboys across the country, Mr. Thomas, who faced years of discrimination during the segregated 1950s with grace, humility, and strength, was one of six inductees into the hall of fame and was nominated for the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum's Rodeo Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City in 2004; and

WHEREAS, Born on January 30, 1930, in Richmond, Willie Thomas was raised on the A. P. George Ranch and eventually became a working cowboy who paid his dues running the cattle farm with his parents, Johnny and Josephine Thomas; in 1952, he participated in his first Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association competition in San Antonio, and from there, he embarked on a 30-year career during which he won 25 saddles and more than 20 belt buckles, including the 1968 all-around title of the Southwestern National Cowboy Association, rode more than 4,000 bulls, and landed top rankings in the world; and

WHEREAS, This exceptionally talented cowboy rode with such renowned riders as Harold Cash, Jim Shoulders, Freckles Brown, and Clyde Frost, father of Lane Frost, a world-famous bull rider whose life story is featured in a film entitled *8 Seconds* and who was president of the Southwestern National Cowboy Association; and

WHEREAS, His accomplishments are especially impressive considering the great obstacles placed in his way throughout his career, including racist rodeo officials who prevented him from competing because of the color of his skin; on one occasion, Mr. Thomas pulled his hat over his eyes, concealed his face, and won a bull riding competition in Lake Charles, Louisiana, only to be stripped of his winnings and escorted from town when the judges discovered he was African American; and

WHEREAS, At the age of nine, Willie Thomas had an accident at the George Ranch that left him with a prosthetic eye; he has also broken his leg nine times and been told twice he would never walk again; despite these setbacks, Mr. Thomas persevered and pursued his dream to become one of the best bull riders in the history of the sport; and

WHEREAS, With a large and loving family that includes his wife, Ora Lee, their nine children, Sandra Pipkin, Dwight Thomas, Glen Thomas, Vicki Meriwether, Berkley Thomas, Willie Thomas, Jr., Myron Thomas, Rodney Thomas, and Sharee Thomas, and 25 grandchildren, Mr. Thomas worked for the Texas Department of Transportation for many years before retiring in August of 1991;

today, he hosts popular trail rides on his farm, promoting a community spirit in Fort Bend County; in addition to being inducted into the Texas Rodeo Cowboy Hall of Fame, he was recognized by the George Ranch, which hosted a reception in his honor; and

WHEREAS, Truly a trailblazer, as well as a man of exceptional abilities, Willie Thomas opened doors for generations of African Americans by helping to get rodeos integrated in Texas and beyond; it is truly a pleasure to pay tribute to his impressive accomplishments, notable rodeo career, and unwavering strength of spirit; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Senate of the State of Texas, 79th Legislature, hereby congratulate Willie Thomas on his induction into the Texas Rodeo Cowboy Hall of Fame and extend to him sincere best wishes for the future; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution be prepared for him as an expression of high regard from the Texas Senate.

Ellis

President of the Senate

I hereby certify that the above Resolution was adopted by the Senate on May 12, 2005.

Secretary of the Senate

Member, Texas Senate