



Legislation Text

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PROPOSED RESOLUTION

HONORING DR. STUART D. STRAHL ON HIS RETIREMENT AS PRESIDENT AND CEO OF THE CHICAGO ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY

WHEREAS, the Forest Preserves of Cook County Board of Commissioners are pleased to congratulate Dr. Stuart D. Strahl on his retirement as President and CEO of the Chicago Zoological Society after 18 years; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Strahl has served as the Chicago Zoological Society's President and CEO since 2003, guiding the Society in its mission to inspire conservation leadership by engaging people and communities with wildlife and nature; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Strahl received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Biology from Bates College, his Ph.D. in Biology from the State University of New York at Albany, and a Doctor of Humane Letters degree from Dominican University; he also has considerable background in higher education instruction, having served as adjunct faculty at the University of Florida, State University of New York and Washington College, among others; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Strahl is a well-respected author and distinguished lecturer, the principal author of numerous scientific and popular publications, and has served for over 10 years as the founding Chair of the IUCN/SSC Specialist Group on the Avian Family Cracidae; and

WHEREAS, a career conservationist with 35 years' experience in applied science, restoration ecology, public policy, and not-for-profit management, Dr. Strahl is experienced in bringing together diverse interests around conservation causes; Dr. Strahl began his career as a field biologist and later was founding Director of Latin American Programs for the Wildlife Conservation Society, where his lasting partnerships in the U.S. and Latin America resulted in preservation of over 30 million acres of wildlife habitat and over \$18 billion in conservation funding; and prior to arriving at the Chicago Zoological Society, as founding President/CEO of Audubon of Florida, Dr. Strahl led the National Audubon Society into prominence as the acknowledged private-sector leader in the largest ecological restoration initiative in history, the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Strahl has served on numerous boards and appointed commissions; including, among others, as a member of the boards of directors of the Society for Conservation Biology, Vital Ground Foundation, and Pickering Creek Audubon Center of the Chesapeake Audubon Society; an Elective Member of the American Ornithologists' Union; and a Professional Member of the Boone and Crockett Club; and

WHEREAS, as President and CEO, Dr. Strahl led the creation of the Chicago Zoological Society's new Centers of Excellence - the Center for the Science of Animal Care & Welfare, enhancing high-level animal care in zoos by applying a broad range of sciences to evaluate and improve animal well-being; and the Center for Conservation Leadership, which serves as a nexus for coordinating fieldwork, zoo-based education, and outreach to change the world by inspiring and engaging as many conservation leaders as possible; and

WHEREAS, the Chicago Zoological Society is world-renowned as a leader in animal welfare and veterinary care, and produces award-winning conservation programs for people of all abilities; under Dr. Strahl's direction, the Society has developed new and innovative exhibits as well as enduring partnerships that provide service to urban communities of color, veterans, individuals with disabilities, and other populations; and

WHEREAS, 2021 marks the 100-year anniversary of the creation of the Chicago Zoological Society, the non-profit organization that operates Brookfield Zoo; and, during his time as CEO, Dr. Strahl strengthened this enduring public-private partnership by helping to shape and advance a common recreational, educational and conservation mission; serving on the Next Century Conservation Plan Commission and Steering Committee, proposing bold actions to make the region a national leader in urban conservation; and

WHEREAS, in an effort to connect communities across the region with nature and wildlife, Dr. Strahl encouraged the distribution of millions of free zoo admission passes in under-resourced communities, and fostered the creation of an Animal Ambassador program, which brings the zoo's animals outside the park to meet with community members who would not otherwise be able to visit the zoo; and

WHEREAS, as a passionate advocate for veterans and their families, Dr. Strahl developed strong partnerships with local VA Hospitals and veteran groups, including Wounded Warrior Project which holds an annual Soldier Ride at Brookfield Zoo; under Dr. Strahl's direction, to honor their service, the admissions fee to the zoo became free for all active, reservist, and retired members of the military; and

WHEREAS, during Dr. Strahl's tenure, Brookfield Zoo welcomed its 150,000,000th guest, and was the most popular paid cultural attraction in the Midwest; it also became the first zoo in the world to receive Humane Certified designation from American Humane for its exemplary animal care and welfare; and

WHEREAS, Brookfield Zoo's campus grew and modernized under Dr. Strahl, fulfilling aspects of a strategic plan focused on animal welfare and engagement of diverse communities; historical exhibits were transformed into Great Bear Wilderness and Regenstein Wolf Woods, showcasing endangered species of North America; the Children's Zoo became Hamill Family Wild Encounters, highlighting opportunities to get up close and personal with nature; the original Reptile House was transformed into the Mary Ann MacLean Conservation Leadership Center, housing all of the zoo's educational outreach programs; and the Pavilions and Hamill Family Nature Plaza were newly constructed to provide spaces for guests to relax during their trip to the zoo; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Strahl reinforced the Chicago Zoological Society's commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and access by implementing comprehensive programs for audience diversity, vendor diversity, and workforce and workplace diversity and inclusion, to make Brookfield Zoo an even more welcoming destination for all visitors and to connect people of all backgrounds with conservation through cutting-edge, inclusive programs and experiences; and

WHEREAS, under Dr. Strahl's leadership, the Chicago Zoological Society received over 60 awards from local, national and international organizations for its educational and conservation programs, inclusive practices, and business acumen; including the Institute of Museum and Library Services' National Medal for Museum Service, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums' Angela Petersen Excellence in Diversity Award and Community Engagement Award for the King Conservation Leadership Academy, the Illinois Association of Museums' Large Institution of the Year award, the Illinois Department of Human Services' Distinguished Service Award for employment of individuals with disabilities, and the Fuller Park Neighborhood Development Corporation's Community Partner of the Year award, among many others; and

WHEREAS, as an avid outdoorsman, Dr. Strahl and his family enjoy exploring remote natural areas, and look forward to spending more time in the wilderness.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that Toni Preckwinkle, President, and the Forest Preserves of Cook County Board of Commissioners congratulate Dr. Stuart Strahl for his dedication, service, and enormous contribution as President and CEO of the Chicago Zoological Society, and wish him well in all of his future endeavors; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a suitable copy of this Resolution be presented to Dr. Stuart Strahl as a token of appreciation for his immense work for the Chicago Zoological Society and with the Forest Preserves of Cook County.