

A CEREMONIAL RESOLUTION

25-232

IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

May 7, 2024

To recognize, honor, and celebrate the late Stephen J. Pollak for his outstanding career in public service, passionate commitment to equal rights, racial justice, and the advancement of the legal profession's role in fulfilling those commitments.

WHEREAS, Mr. Pollak was born on the south side of Chicago, and grew up on the north side in Highland Park where he was an Eagle Scout;

WHEREAS, Mr. Pollak earned his undergraduate degree from Dartmouth College, where he captained the swim team, and wrote a paper entitled "What Are We Americans Doing About Racial Discrimination";

WHEREAS, Mr. Pollak served in the Navy throughout college and as an Officer of the Deck on several ships including the destroyer USS Borie during the Korean War;

WHEREAS, Mr. Pollak was honorably discharged from the Navy in 1953 and then attended Yale Law School where he was managing editor of the Yale Law Journal, graduating in 1956;

WHEREAS, between 1961 and 1969, Mr. Pollak served the administrations of Presidents Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson as Assistant to the Solicitor General, Legal Counsel to the President's Task Force on the War Against Poverty, First Assistant and then, later, head of the Civil Rights Division, Deputy General Counsel for the Office of Economic Opportunity, Special Assistant to the Attorney General, and leader of President Johnson's Legislative Task Force on Civil Rights;

WHEREAS, in March 1965, Mr. Pollak met with march organizers, worked with local police, and coordinated with the Federalized National Guard to secure the safety of the civil rights activists who marched in Alabama from Selma to Montgomery;

WHEREAS, Mr. Pollak was there when the marchers arrived at the Alabama State Capitol and heard Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. declare "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice";

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WHEREAS, in 1965, Mr. Pollak was tasked with managing the progress of the Voting Rights Act legislation on Capitol Hill;

WHEREAS, Mr. Pollak worked to gain the full support of Republican Senator Everett Dirksen of Illinois and Democratic Senator Mike Mansfield of Montana, influential members of the Judiciary Committee, for the Voting Rights Act;

WHEREAS, in 1968, as head of the Civil Rights Division, Mr. Pollak argued the case *Allen v. State Board of Elections* in front of the Supreme Court of the United States, facing withering questioning from Justice Hugo Black and ultimately winning the case and protecting African American voting rights for more than 50 years;

WHEREAS, in 1967 President Johnson named Mr. Pollak as his advisor to the President for National Capital Affairs where, at the President's direction, Mr. Pollak consulted key leaders in Congress about the reorganization plan for the government of the District of Columbia and, upon its passage, assisted the President in identifying and appointing the city's first African American Mayor, Walter Washington, and the new Council of the District of Columbia;

WHEREAS, in late 1967, Mr. Pollak returned to the Department of Justice, first as Special Assistant to the Attorney General and then as head of the Civil Rights Division;

WHEREAS, under his leadership the civil rights focus of the Justice Department expanded beyond the Deep South, intensifying its efforts in equal employment, law enforcement, and school desegregation across the nation;

WHEREAS, following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and upheaval in cities across the nation, Mr. Pollak led and coordinated the federal response from Washington as well as in Memphis and elsewhere;

WHEREAS, Mr. Pollak led the Johnson Administration's battle for fair housing, both in Congress and the courts, including important work to secure the passage of the Fair Housing Act of 1968;

WHEREAS, across his career, Mr. Pollak argued 12 cases before the Supreme Court;

WHEREAS, in 1969 Mr. Pollak joined the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law;

WHEREAS, Mr. Pollak served on the Board of the Lawyers' Committee until 2022, co-chaired both the national and DC organizations, and was recognized with the Whitney North Seymour Award for 1994 as well as the Lloyd Cutler Lifetime Achievement Award in December 2023;

ENROLLED ORIGINAL

WHEREAS, in 1969 Mr. Pollak joined the law firm of Shea & Gardner as its youngest partner, serving on and chairing the firm’s Executive Committee for a term prior to its merger with Goodwin Proctor in 2004;

WHEREAS, Mr. Pollak served as outside counsel for the International Ladies’ Garment Workers Union, fighting for worker protections under the Fair Labor Standards Act from wage, child labor, and other abuses;

WHEREAS, Mr. Pollak served as lead outside counsel on major litigation for the United Mine Workers of America Health and Retirement Funds, and lead outside counsel for the National Education Association;

WHEREAS, in 1977 Mr. Pollak served as outside counsel to President Jimmy Carter’s Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare;

WHEREAS, Mr. Pollak drafted the regulations implementing Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which guaranteed persons with disabilities reasonable accommodations and access to public services;

WHEREAS, Mr. Pollak was a member of the Panel of Mediators for the U.S. Court of Appeals – D.C. Circuit since 1989, acting as Chair from 2016 to 2023;

WHEREAS, Mr. Pollak served as President of the DC Bar, as well as the DC Bar Foundation, and as a Commissioner of the DC Access to Justice Commission;

WHEREAS, Mr. Pollak twice chaired the DC Judicial Nominations Commission;

WHEREAS, Mr. Pollak was Chair, President, and member of the Board of Directors of the Historical Society of the District of Columbia Circuit, serving for more than 30 years and leading the Society’s Oral History Program;

WHEREAS, Mr. Pollak passed away on February 3, 2024, at the age of 95; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Pollak is survived by his wife Ruth, 4 children and their partners, 8 grandchildren, and one great grandchild, with another on the way.

RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this resolution may be cited as the “Stephen J. Pollak Posthumous Recognition Resolution of 2024”.

ENROLLED ORIGINAL

Sec. 2. The Council of the District of Columbia recognizes, honors, and celebrates Stephen J. Pollak for his lifelong commitment to public service, championing of civil rights, and service as a powerful beacon to generations of younger attorneys.

Sec. 3. This resolution shall take effect immediately.