



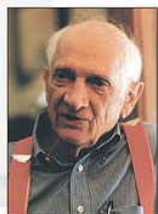
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Move to honor former U.S. Rep. Jack Brooks

Proposal would rename Southeast Texas Regional Airport

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News Editor

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A quiet movement to honor former Congressman Jack Brooks for his longtime commitment to Southeast Texas is getting louder as several Jefferson County Commissioners have said they would be in favor of renaming the Southeast Texas Regional Airport after a man who has done so much for this region.

Pushing the initiative is a longtime lawyer and friend to Brooks, Hubert Oxford III, who said the accomplishments Brooks made on behalf of Southeast Texas touch nearly everyone.

"If you drink water and you live in Southeast Texas, you have Jack Brooks to thank for it," Oxford said in an exclusive interview with The Examiner. "If you have flood insurance, you owe it to Jack Brooks. If you work anywhere along the ship channel or know someone who does, you owe it to Jack Brooks. There is really so much that he has done for this area and I think it is only fitting that we honor him in a very special way. He was a primary player in the move to build the Sam Rayburn Dam and Reservoir. He was also instrumental in the construction of the LNVA's (Lower Neches Valley Authority) saltwater barrier."

Brooks served Southeast Texas in the U.S. House of Representatives for 42 years. He was chairman of the Select Committee on Congressional Operations, the Subcommittee on Legislation and National Security, the Joint Committee on Congressional Operations and the House Government Operations Committee. He is married to Charlotte Brooks, lives in Beaumont and is still active in the Democratic Party.

When questioned, not a single commissioner spoke against the proposal to rename the airport in honor of Brooks, and commissioners Bo Alfred and Michael "Shane" Sinegal both said they would support it.

"I am 110 percent behind it," Sinegal said. "Jack Brooks has done so much for this area and I think he is very deserving of this. So, yes, when I was asked about it I said I would support it, absolutely."

"My mom was about to lose her house over some issue when I was young and she made a call to Congressman Brooks in 1969 or 1970, and he made one call and she still lives in that house today," Sinegal said. "I don't remember the specifics of it all, but he has always been good to this community."

"I promise you I am behind it and I think the people of Port Arthur would be supportive of it because Congressman Brooks was good to us, and his support of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act means a lot."

Likewise, Alfred said he wanted to honor Brooks' legacy and had no issues with renaming the airport as a show of gratitude.

"I have been very much on board with that for a while," Alfred said. "Personally, I think Jack Brooks has done so much for our area, it is a fitting tribute that the Southeast Texas Regional Airport should be renamed in honor of Jack Brooks. I am not opposed to that whatsoever. I am one of those who without a doubt would be glad to carry that torch."

Oxford has made a request that he be placed on the agenda for next week's Commissioners Court meeting

Commissioner Eddie Arnold said he wanted more information before committing but said he wasn't against the idea and would like to know how his constituents feel about the idea.

"I would just like to know more about Congressman Brooks' contributions to this area," Arnold said. "He was already out of office when I came to the area, so there are probably some things that I am not aware of."

Commissioner Pct. 2 Mark Domingue wasn't against the plan but wanted to ensure the change wouldn't cause issues with the Federal Aviation Administration.

"I suggested to them that whoever is interested in that initiative ought to come to Commissioners Court," Domingue said. "I don't know what the exact proposal is and I don't know what the issues would be with the FAA. I would also like to see what kind of public response we get and based on that, the court could decide if they wanted to rename the entire airport or just the terminal or however they wanted to handle it. I think it is worth considering. Congressman Brooks has certainly done a lot for this area and we were especially thankful for his efforts during the storm surge in Hurricane Ike and the fact that had it not been for that storm levee, south Jefferson County would have suffered a lot more damage than it did. He was a very effective congressman for a long time, so yes, I think it is worth entertaining any of those proposals."

Jefferson County Emergency Management Coordinator Greg Fountain agreed that one of Brooks' greatest accomplishments proved its importance Sept. 13, 2008. That was when Hurricane Ike slammed into the area causing massive damage but little flooding in Jefferson County. The sea wall and levees built with the support of Brooks' congressional muscle saved much of Southeast Texas from being washed away.

"If not for Jack Brooks, we would not have a mid- and south Jefferson County today, at least not in the manner in which we see them now," said Fountain. "Those levees saved a lot of people's homes from being washed away."

But Brooks' forward thinking on flooding issues didn't end with the construction of the levee systems. He also saw the need to alleviate flooding in Beaumont's West End, which was booming at the time. He obtained millions of dollars in funding for the Taylor's Bayou project, which redirected floodwaters.

Naming just a few of the battles Brooks won for Southeast Texas, Oxford said Brooks' fight to deepen the Sabine-Neches Waterway paved the way for the economic expansion that built the entire region and made Beaumont, Port Arthur and Orange a powerhouse in the petrochemical realm. And Oxford said legislation drafted, filed and fought for by Brooks secured flood insurance to protect families and business from catastrophic losses.

"Jack Brooks did so much for this area, it is hard to list every single thing. His support on flooding issues and insurance speaks for itself," Oxford said. "As for the channel, the ships we have today would have never been able to make it up the waterway as it was. He was able to get funding to go from a depth of 30 feet to 40 feet at a time when the ships were getting too large to navigate that waterway. That allowed bigger tankers to come to our ports and helped build our industrial infrastructure."

Before Brooks fought for Texas and his congressional district, he fought for his country. According to the Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin, Brooks enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps during World War II and served for about two years in the Pacific theater on Guadalcanal, Guam, Okinawa and in north China. He continued his military service in the Marine Corps Reserves until his retirement as a colonel in 1972.

Oxford said he is passionate about this movement to rename the airport in honor of Brooks and said there are several others in the community who feel as strongly as he does. He said Brooks is a legend and the fact that he did so much for Southeast Texas is something that cannot be overlooked.

"The downtown post office was named in his honor but that was done out of Washington; we, the people in Southeast Texas owe Congressman Brooks a debt of gratitude and I think this is a fitting tribute," Oxford said. "This is not something that he has asked for, and in fact, it will be a surprise when it comes to

EXAMINER EDITORIAL

Jack Brooks

Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers that begat us. The Lord hath wrought great glory by them through his great power from the beginning. - - Ecclesiasticus 44:1-2

It is perhaps not fashionable in some circles today to cite the hand of divine Providence in the works of man, but those lines of Scripture written above speak to the character and accomplishments of Jack Brooks, who walks among us today in a society whose truth, justice and prosperity bear his mark in so many ways.

He was born in Crowley, La., on Dec. 18, 1922, and moved to Beaumont at the age of five. He attended public schools here and received a scholarship to Lamar Junior College. He transferred to the University of Texas where he earned a B.A. in journalism in 1943. During World War II, Brooks enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps and served in Pacific theater on Guadalcanal, Guam and Okinawa. He continued his military service in the Marine Corps Reserves until his retirement as a colonel in 1972.

Brooks was elected at age 24 to represent Jefferson County in the Texas Legislature. Four years later, in 1952, he was elected to the House of Representatives where he would remain for five decades of service. He soon became a close friend of two legendary Texas figures - House Speaker Sam Rayburn and Senate Majority Leader Lyndon B. Johnson, both of whom valued his friendship and talent. He was in Dallas the day President Kennedy was assassinated and stood with LBJ as he took the oath of office that same afternoon onboard Air Force One.

Brooks remained a strong Congressional supporter of the Johnson agenda, and it was in Congress that he left his imprint on history. He worked closely with presidents from both parties, and never forgot the folks back home in Southeast Texas. From making sure our region received an equitable share of federal resources to solving the problems of ordinary citizens with Social Security, the VA and myriad other government agencies, he was our man in Washington.

As a ranking member of the Judiciary Committee, Brooks helped write the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965; he was one of the few southern congressmen to support civil rights legislation. As the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, Brooks sponsored significant pieces of legislation, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and the Civil Rights Act of 1991.

Beaumont attorney Hubert Oxford III has begun a campaign to honor Jack Brooks by having the Southeast Texas Regional Airport renamed as a tribute to his

fruition.

"I think it is safe to say that there isn't anyone on commissioners court who hasn't been touched in some way by Congressman Brook's efforts to strengthen and improve Southeast Texas."

remarkable man. Oxford will appear before the Jefferson County Commissioners Court on Monday, March 29, at 1:30 p.m. to make that case. Join him.

Accomplishments of Jack Brooks

- Instrumental in having Lamar Junior College declared a four-year university, as well as securing funding for the expansion of the university
- Primary player in supporting the construction and financing of the Sam Rayburn Reservoir - the largest freshwater reservoir in Texas
- Secured funding for the deepening and widening of the Sabine-Neches Waterway
- Secured funding for the Galveston Bay Study and the development of the Wallisville Reservoir
- Secured funding for the Port of Galveston and Texas City Port improvements
- Approved plans for the Public Health Service Hospital in Galveston and its affiliation with the University of Texas Medical Branch
- Secured funding for the completion of the Big Hill Strategic Petroleum Reserve
- Authored legislation to provide flood insurance to businesses and individuals
- Authorized the Neches River Saltwater Barrier project in 1974
- Obtained funding for the wastewater treatment facilities in Nederland, Cheek, China, Nome, Lumberton, Port Neches and Groves
- Obtained millions of dollars in funding for development in the city of Port Arthur and responsible for the development of the area where Central Mall and Walmart are located
- Obtained funding to build the hurricane levee system in Jefferson County
- Obtained funding for the Taylor's Bayou Flood Protection Project
- Authored the Brooks Act, allowing for competitive bidding on government computers, which were previously rented. Also, authored the Competition in Contracting Act of 1994 establishing a Federal Procurement Office
- Helped author the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and 1991, as well as the Voting Rights Act of 1965
- Helped create the office of Inspector General to help detect and prevent government fraud and waste
- Credited for saving the space program, Brooks was instrumental in obtaining funding to help NASA with the International Space Station, for which he received the highest civilian honor NASA awards