

STATE OF OKLAHOMA

2nd Session of the 55th Legislature (2016)

SENATE BILL 1490

By: Jech

AS INTRODUCED

An Act relating to memorial highway designations; designating the J. Cooper West Memorial Highway; requiring certain markers; providing biographical information; providing for codification; providing for noncodification; and providing an effective date.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA:

SECTION 1. NEW LAW A new section of law to be codified in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 1698.231 of Title 69, unless there is created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

The section of Interstate 40 Business extending west from the Beckham County Line to one-quarter (1/4) of a mile west of the Interstate 40 and State Highway 34 Interchange shall be designated as the "J. Cooper West Memorial Highway". The Department of Transportation shall cause suitable permanent markers bearing that name to be placed on the highway.

SECTION 2. NEW LAW A new section of law not to be codified in the Oklahoma Statutes reads as follows:

1 J. Cooper West was born to Mae (Mary Cooper) and G. R. West on
2 the family farm in Duke, Oklahoma on September 7, 1916 and passed
3 away at the age of 97 on August 4, 2014. Cooper was the fourth of
4 seven children. He was raised throughout western Oklahoma as his
5 father, a Southern Baptist minister and farmer, moved to different
6 churches in Weatherford, Putnam City, Granite, Enid, and Port.

7 J. Cooper West graduated from Port High School in western
8 Washita County, where he held various jobs to pay for school
9 expenses including driving a school bus. In 1938, he earned an
10 economics degree and a teacher's certificate at Northwestern State
11 College (now Northwestern Oklahoma State University) in Alva. At
12 college he played football and basketball and ran track, holding up
13 to three concurrent jobs (including as a baker and lifeguard) to
14 help cover his expenses. These were the challenging "Dust Bowl"
15 years that forced many to leave Oklahoma - as memorialized by John
16 Steinbeck in "The Grapes of Wrath" - and strengthened the Great
17 Depression.

18 J. Cooper West married the former Gladys Thelma Webb on December
19 24, 1937, during their senior year in college. After graduating in
20 1938, they moved to Woodward. Cooper joined the Zenith Gas Company
21 and rose to assistant manager. During this time, he and Gladys also
22 operated a coffee shop in the Woodward Hotel, and bought, remodeled,
23 and resold houses in Woodward.

1 In 1944, J. Cooper West joined the World War II effort by
2 enlisting in the United States Navy. He attended Officer's
3 Candidate School in Florida, graduated as an Ensign, and was
4 promoted to Lieutenant Junior Grade. He served in the Pacific
5 Theater including Iwo Jima and Okinawa. After the surrender of
6 Japan on September 2, 1945, he was among the first American military
7 personnel to enter Japan.

8 Following his discharge from the Navy in 1946, Cooper, Gladys,
9 and their two children - Gail and John - moved to Elk City, where
10 Nancy, their third child, was born. In Elk City, Cooper and Gladys
11 established the Cooper West Agency, which sold insurance, homes, and
12 real estate, and later entered oil & gas and minerals leasing.
13 Their business activities over time included investments in oil and
14 gas ventures, homebuilding and land development, farming, and
15 banking.

16 J. Cooper West was a life-long resident and enthusiastic
17 supporter of the economic development of Oklahoma. In 1963, he
18 joined the Oklahoma State Highway Commission and served for eight
19 years under Governors Henry Bellmon and Dewey Bartlett, and was
20 instrumental in the planning and construction of the I-40 Corridor
21 and many other major arteries in the Oklahoma highway system. In
22 1989, he joined the University of Oklahoma Board of Regents and
23 twice served as Vice Chairman during his seven year appointment,
24 which bridged the administrations of OU Presidents Richard Van Horn

1 and former Governor and United States Senator David Boren (who
2 Cooper helped recruit to the Norman campus from Washington, DC).

3 J. Cooper West was active in many educational and community
4 endeavors including the First Baptist Church of Elk City, the
5 Oklahoma Baptist Homes for Children and Boys Ranch Town, the Elk
6 City Golf and Country Club, the Western Oklahoma Historical Society
7 (a Hall of Fame member), the Oklahoma Historical Society (where he
8 and Gladys funded The West Family Wing), the Elk City Rotary Club
9 and Park, the development of Old Town Museum and Elk City Lake, the
10 expansion of Ackley Park, and many others.

11 J. Cooper West and his wife, Gladys, traveled extensively
12 throughout Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. In Elk City, they
13 loved hosting their extended family and wide circle of friends in
14 their warm home and at their nearby farm for quail hunting, fishing,
15 and relaxing in the picnic area, under Cooper's favorite shade
16 trees. For one entire summer, for example, they hosted the nephew
17 of President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing of France, who was interested
18 in seeing the American West. With an exemplary work ethic, Gladys
19 and Cooper regularly visited their offices until February 2012, when
20 they were 95.

21 Everyone loved J. Cooper West's infectious smile, bright
22 optimism, fun sense of humor, and effortless ability to -
23 irrespective of the situation - always make them feel better about
24 themselves. He enjoyed a full and exciting life, made a positive

1 impact on Elk City and Oklahoma, and served as a role model for his
2 family and many friends.

3 SECTION 3. This act shall become effective November 1, 2016.
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