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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2025

HOUSE RESOLUTION

CONGRATULATING ROBERT BILLINGTON ON HIS RETIREMENT AT THE END OF  
JUNE, 2025, AS THE DIRECTOR OF THE BLACKSTONE VALLEY TOURISM COUNCIL  
AFTER FORTY YEARS OF DISTINGUISHED SERVICE

Introduced By: Representatives Phillips, Shekarchi, Blazejewski, Chippendale, J. Brien,  
Casey, Marszalkowski, Ackerman, Santucci, and Paplauskas  
Date Introduced: June 10, 2025

Referred To: House read and passed

1           WHEREAS, Robert Billington, the founder of the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council in  
2   1985, has lived a long and distinguished life. A direct descendent of the Pilgrims who arrived on  
3   the Mayflower, Mr. Billington was born in Pawtucket. At an early age he developed a fascination  
4   with history. He later joined the United States Coast Guard where he served aboard the USCGC  
5   Vigorous, worked on two International Ice patrols, and served our nation with honor and  
6   distinction; and

7           WHEREAS, After receiving an honorable discharge from the Coast Guard, Mr.  
8   Billington joined his family’s manufacturing business on the Blackstone River, while  
9   simultaneously attending Johnson & Wales University earning both an undergraduate degree and  
10   a doctorate degree. He also served as an adjunct professor at Boston University, Bristol  
11   Community College, Johnson & Wales University and Lasell University; and

12           WHEREAS, In 1985, Robert Billington created the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council  
13   and discovered his true calling. His accomplishments and the positive impact he has had on the  
14   entire Blackstone Valley have been substantial. Among his greatest achievements was the  
15   establishment of a partnership fifteen years ago with the Sustainable Tourism Lab to bring  
16   together global experts twice a year to teach and learn about sustainability; and

17           WHEREAS, Other milestones under Mr. Billington’s leadership included receiving  
18   certification from the United Nations World Tourism Organization, and earning the Ulysses Prize  
19   for Excellence in the Creation and Dissemination of Knowledge in Tourism. Mr. Billington also

1 played a key role in the development of the Blackstone Valley Bikeway; and

2 WHEREAS, In addition to prioritizing development along the Blackstone River, Robert  
3 Billington takes great pride in having overseen the construction of five riverboats—The  
4 Blackstone Valley Explorer, two River ferryboats, the Hope and the Renaissance, and an English  
5 Canal boat, the Samuel Slater. Under his guidance, the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council  
6 launched popular annual events including the Chinese Dragon Boat Races & Taiwan Day Festival  
7 in Pawtucket, which draws ten thousand people, and the Polar Express Holiday train ride in  
8 Woonsocket, which draws 18,000 people. Mr. Billington serves as the conductor of the Polar  
9 Express and plans to continue in this role during retirement; and

10 WHEREAS, Robert Billington has also served as the Commissioner of the Blackstone  
11 Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission, led the creation of the Blackstone River  
12 Watershed Council, Water Cruises of Rhode Island, the Rhode Island Music Hall of Fame, and  
13 the Cumberland Historic District Commission. As the Past Chairman of the Old Slater Mill  
14 Association, he led efforts to establish the Blackstone River Valley National Historic Park; and

15 WHEREAS, In recognition of his exemplary service, Robert Billington has received  
16 numerous honors and awards, including the Tourism for Tomorrow Award from the World  
17 Travel and Tourism Council, the Phoenix Award from the Society of American Travel Writers,  
18 and the aforementioned Ulysses Prize. Mr. Billington also was recognized as the Person of the  
19 Year by World Travel Awards; and

20 WHEREAS, Robert Billington is the beloved husband of Debbie Billington and the  
21 devoted father of Ryan, a Commander in the United States Navy and Executive Officer on the  
22 USS Howard, and Sarah, a segment producer with The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon. Mr.  
23 Billington is also the proud grandfather of four grandchildren; now, therefore be it

24 RESOLVED, That this House of Representatives of the State of Rhode Island hereby  
25 heartily and joyously congratulates Robert Billington on his retirement at the end of June after  
26 forty years of exemplary service as the Director of the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council; and  
27 be it further

28 RESOLVED, That the Secretary of State be and hereby is authorized and directed to  
29 transmit a duly certified copy of this resolution to Mr. Robert Billington, Executive Director,  
30 Blackstone Valley Tourism Council.

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