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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

HOUSE RESOLUTION

EXPRESSING DEEPEST CONDOLENCES ON THE PASSING OF AMBASSADOR  
J. WILLIAM MIDDENDORF II

Introduced By: Representatives Shekarchi, Blazejewski, McGaw, Chippendale, Abney,  
Fogarty, Ajello, Fellela, Tanzi, and McNamara  
Date Introduced: January 15, 2026

Referred To: House read and passed

1 WHEREAS, It is with deep sadness that this House of Representatives has learned of the  
2 passing of J. William Middendorf II, a distinguished former Ambassador and United States Navy  
3 World War II veteran. He was the beloved husband of the late Isabelle Jackson Paine for 63  
4 years; and

5 WHEREAS, John William Middendorf II, was born in Baltimore, Maryland, the son of  
6 Sarah and Harry Middendorf. He rowed and played sports in high school, and briefly attended  
7 Harvard, but because there were no Navy ROTC openings at Harvard, he transferred to the  
8 College of the Holy Cross; and

9 WHEREAS, While attending the College of the Holy Cross, J. William Middendorf II,  
10 joined the Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps and played basketball with the highly regarded  
11 Holy Cross Basketball Team and Hall of Fame teammate, the legendary Bob Cousy. While at  
12 Holy Cross, Mr. Middendorf took classes in navigation, naval history, engineering, gunnery, and  
13 ship stability; and

14 WHEREAS, After graduating from Holy Cross with a degree in Naval Science, Mr.  
15 Middendorf served with distinction in the United States Navy as an officer in World War II. Mr.  
16 Middendorf served as an Engineer Officer and Navigator aboard the USS LCS(L) 53, and was  
17 later stationed in China, first as a member of the occupation forces and later as part of a security  
18 detail for General George Marshall, who at the time was trying to broker a peace deal in the  
19 Chinese Civil War between Mao Zedong and Chiang Kai-shek; and

1           WHEREAS, After completing his military obligation, Mr. Middendorf attended Harvard  
2 College, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1947 and was a member of the Hasty  
3 Pudding Theatricals and the Owl Club. Mr. Middendorf later attended the Stern School of  
4 Business at NYU, where he earned his MBA. Upon graduation, Mr. Middendorf became an  
5 investment banker, founded the highly successful Middendorf, Colgate and Company, and gained  
6 a seat on the New York Stock Exchange; and

7           WHEREAS, Mr. Middendorf was also very active in Republican politics, first at the local  
8 level in Connecticut, then in service to the 1964 presidential campaign of Barry Goldwater,  
9 serving as the Treasurer of the Republican National Committee from 1965 to 1969; and

10          WHEREAS, Beginning in 1969, Mr. Middendorf began a long and distinguished period  
11 of public service, mostly in ambassadorial and military-related positions, starting with Mr.  
12 Middendorf's appointment to serve as the United States Ambassador to the Netherlands by  
13 President Nixon, a position he held until June of 1973; and

14          WHEREAS, Upon returning to the United States, Mr. Middendorf was chosen to serve as  
15 the Under Secretary of the United States Navy and later was chosen to serve as the Secretary of  
16 the Navy when Secretary John Warner left to serve on the Bicentennial Commission. Mr.  
17 Middendorf was confirmed by the Senate and served in this position until the end of the Ford  
18 administration. His most notable accomplishments included securing a 60 percent increase in the  
19 Navy budget, while Army and Air Force spending remained flat; and

20          WHEREAS, Mr. Middendorf declined President Carter's offer to remain as the Secretary  
21 of the Navy, and returned to the private sector in 1977, serving as the President and Chief  
22 Executive Officer of Financial General BankShares, which Mr. Middendorf re-organized and  
23 renamed First American Bank; and

24          WHEREAS, Mr. Middendorf returned to public service once again in 1980, serving as  
25 the head of the CIA transition team for incoming President Reagan, then later serving as the  
26 Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the Organization of the American  
27 States (OAS), with the rank of Ambassador. In 1984, President Reagan appointed him to serve as  
28 the U.S. Representative to the European Community, known today as the European Union, a  
29 position he held until 1987; and

30          WHEREAS, In his free time, Mr. Middendorf was a devotee of the arts and was a prolific  
31 composer of symphonies. One of the highlights of his music career was his writing of more than  
32 100 marches and the Holland Symphony, which he presented to Dutch Queen Juliana on the 25th  
33 Anniversary of her ascension to the throne. In recognition of his excellence in music, Mr.  
34 Middendorf received the "Edwin Franko Goldman Award" from the American Bandmasters

1 Association, and was a member of the American Society of Composers and Performers; and

2 WHEREAS, In his later years, Mr. Middendorf wrote two well-received books, "A  
3 Glorious Disaster: Barry Goldwater's Presidential Campaign and the Origins of the Conservative  
4 Movement", and "Potomac Fever: A Memoir of Politics and Public Service", in which President  
5 George H.W. Bush said that Mr. Middendorf "was always constructively involved in the political  
6 world, and he is a good friend. For those who believe in public service, Bill Middendorf's memoir  
7 should be a must read."; and

8 WHEREAS, Mr. Middendorf was a member of the Council of American Ambassadors,  
9 Defense Forum Foundation, the Board of Directors of the International Republican Institute, and  
10 was a member of the Heritage Foundation. He was also a member of the Rhode Island Society of  
11 the Sons of Revolution and the Navy League of the United States; and

12 WHEREAS, Mr. Middendorf leaves behind his daughters, Frances Middendorf and Dr.  
13 Amy Givler, and her husband, Don, and his son, Ralph Middendorf and his wife, Sofia, and  
14 daughter-in-law, Jeni Middendorf. He also leaves behind his grandchildren, Martha, Chandler,  
15 John, Rowen, Remi, Laila, and Wolfie, along with four great-grandchildren. He was predeceased  
16 by his wife, Isabelle Jackson Paine Middendorf and children, Martha and John; now, therefore be  
17 it

18 RESOLVED, That this House of Representatives of the State of Rhode Island hereby  
19 expresses its deepest condolences on the passing of J. William Middendorf II; and be it further

20 RESOLVED, That the Secretary of State be and hereby is authorized and directed to  
21 transmit duly certified copies of this resolution to Frances Middendorf, Dr. Amy Givler and  
22 Ralph Middendorf.

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