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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2022

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SENATE RESOLUTION

COMMEMORATING THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LIFE-SAVING HEROICS OF  
THE LATE THOMAS N. PRINSTER

Introduced By: Senators Anderson, de la Cruz, Quezada, Burke, DiPalma, Lombardo,  
Raptakis, and Acosta

Date Introduced: February 15, 2022

Referred To: Recommended for Immediate Consideration

1           WHEREAS, Thomas N. Prinster grew up in Grand Junction, Colorado. As a young man,  
2 he was a star football player who attended Gonzaga University, graduating with a degree in  
3 literature. He learned to fly and attained his pilot's license. His first assignment was to scout  
4 climbing routes in the peaks around Grand Junction; and

5           WHEREAS, Mr. Prinster served our nation with valor and distinction as a member of the  
6 United States Navy. During the Vietnam War he flew submarine patrols from the USS Enterprise  
7 before returning home to begin a career as a commercial pilot; and

8           WHEREAS, On the fateful day of February 21, 1982, Mr. Prinster was piloting a Pilgrim  
9 Airlines Flight 458 plane that took off in the afternoon from New London, Connecticut, on a  
10 flight to Boston with ten passengers. Tragically a fire broke out below the cockpit while the plane  
11 was near the Scituate Reservoir, which was later determined to have been caused by a faulty  
12 deicing system. The cockpit area was consumed with smoke and fire; and

13           WHEREAS, Shortly thereafter, the controls of the plane were white hot and Mr. Prinster  
14 and his co-pilot First Officer Lyle Hogg were being roasted by the fire. Unfortunately, if Mr.  
15 Prinster let go of the controls, the plane would crash and all would perish. Despite the fact that  
16 their uniforms were melting to their bodies, their hair was singed, and the heat was charring their  
17 arms, legs and torso, Mr. Prinster remained at his station, never letting go of the controls, and was  
18 able to guide and safely crash-land the plane. As a result, eleven of the twelve people aboard the  
19 plane survived, with one perishing from smoke inhalation; and

1           WHEREAS, After landing on the frozen reservoir, Mr. Prinster and co-pilot Hogg  
2 walked to the shore a quarter-mile away in incredible pain, before collapsing but not before they  
3 had done everything possible for the passengers. Mr. Prinster's body suffered seventy percent  
4 burns, many of them third-degree. He spent the following six months at Massachusetts General  
5 Hospital where he was one of the first recipients of artificial skin. Sadly, his lungs were scarred  
6 for the rest of his life; and

7           WHEREAS, After recovering, Mr. Prinster and Mr. Hogg were invited to the White  
8 House to meet President Reagan and received the United States Department of Transportation  
9 Heroism Award. The Rhode Island Governor awarded Mr. Prinster the State Life Saving Medal,  
10 and the two pilots were honored with a park near the crash site named for them. They also  
11 received the 1982 Order of Daedalians Civilian Air Safety Award, a Veterans of Foreign Wars  
12 Citation for Heroism, the "Well Done" award from the Charles Lindbergh Chapter of the Air  
13 Force Association, and numerous other awards and accolades; and

14           WHEREAS, After recovering from his injuries, Mr. Prinster took to the air again, but  
15 soon thereafter he chose a different path in life and attained a degree in psychotherapy and  
16 became a psychoanalyst and counselor. He also enjoyed writing novels later in life. Sadly, Mr.  
17 Prinster died in 2018 due to complications from the 1982 crash and was inducted posthumously  
18 into the Rhode Island Aviation Hall of Fame in 2019. The memory of Thomas Prinster's  
19 incredible life-saving heroics and courage on February 21, 1982, will live on forever; now,  
20 therefore be it

21           RESOLVED, That this Senate of the State of Rhode Island hereby commemorates the  
22 40th Anniversary of the life-saving heroics of Thomas N. Prinster and honors the memory of his  
23 courageous and valorous actions on the fateful day of February 21, 1982; and be it further

24           RESOLVED, That the Secretary of State be and hereby is authorized and directed to  
25 transmit a duly certified copy of this resolution to Joyce Anderson.

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