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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2019

H O U S E R E S O L U T I O N

EXPRESSING CONDOLENCES ON THE PASSING OF JOHN THOMAS LEYDEN

Introduced By: Representatives Roberts, Shekarchi, Filippi, Mattiello, and Chippendale

Date Introduced: January 02, 2019

Referred To: House read and passed

1 WHEREAS, John Thomas Leyden, known by his many friends as "Big John", passed
2 away on December 23, 2018, surrounded by his loved ones. He was the beloved husband of
3 Arlene Leyden for sixty-two years; and

4 WHEREAS, Mr. Leyden was born in East Greenwich, a son of the late Matthew and
5 Mary Leyden. He served our nation with honor and distinction in Korea where he earned the rank
6 of Sergeant in the United States Army. John always prioritized God, Family and Country first in
7 his life; and

8 WHEREAS, After completing his military service, Mr. Leyden took advantage of the GI
9 Bill and attended the University of Rhode Island, where he met the love of his life, Arlene. After
10 graduation, he went on to teach Agricultural Education and the FFA (Future Farmers of America)
11 at Scituate Junior and Senior High School. He taught for thirty years, developed a number of
12 award-winning programs, and made a difference in the lives of so many youngsters as an
13 educator, coach, and mentor. He was a very popular and highly respected teacher who was fondly
14 known as "Chief" by all of his students and colleagues. He received the Rhode Island Teacher of
15 the Year award in 1975; and

16 WHEREAS, Mr. Leyden and his wife purchased 100 acres of land in West Greenwich
17 and started Big John Leyden's Christmas Tree Farm in 1974. Thanks to his natural exuberance
18 and charismatic personality, his tree farm became a beloved institution in the State of Rhode
19 Island, and on the national stage where he became a national spokesman for real trees and
20 regularly appeared on the CBS Early Show for eighteen years. John's opening lines of "Welcome,

1 Welcome, Welcome", and "Real Trees for Real People" became famous catch phrases both in
2 Rhode Island and across the nation; and

3 WHEREAS, Mr. Leyden was selected to be a member of the East Greenwich Athletic
4 Hall of Fame in 1996 and the East Greenwich Wall of Fame in 2009. He and his wife were avid
5 golfers and members of the Golf Harbor Golf Club in Fort Myers, Florida; and

6 WHEREAS, In addition to his wife, Arlene, Mr. Leyden leaves two sons, Matthew W.
7 Leyden and his wife, Mary, and J. Timothy Leyden and his wife, Barbara. He also leaves behind
8 two sisters, Margaret Lundberg and Joan Bezak, five grandchildren, Matthew J. Leyden, Erin
9 Leyden-Healey and her husband, John, Meghan Andrikos and her husband, Dean, Sean Charles
10 Leyden and Dylan Thomas Leyden, and two great-grandsons, Owen and Jack. He was preceded
11 in death by his siblings, Russell Leyden, Cathleen "Pieraccini" Erba, and Robert Leyden; now,
12 therefore be it

13 RESOLVED, That this House of Representatives of the State of Rhode Island and
14 Providence Plantations hereby expresses its condolences to the Leyden Family on the passing of
15 John Thomas Leyden; and be it further

16 RESOLVED, That the Secretary of State be and hereby is authorized and directed to
17 transmit a duly certified copy of this resolution to Mrs. Arlene Leyden and Family.

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