

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2010

SENATE RESOLUTION

HONORING DR. ROBERT J. MCKENNA FOR HIS EXEMPLARY SERVICE TO THE
CITIZENS AND STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

Introduced By: Senators Paiva-Weed, C Levesque, Felag, Gallo, and Jabour

Date Introduced: April 06, 2010

Referred To: Senate read and passed

1 WHEREAS, The Honorable Dr. Robert J. McKenna has earned the utmost respect of
2 educators, students, department directors, Boards of Directors, legislators, constituents, staff, and
3 all related entities for the insight, knowledge, hard work, professional courtesy, and wise counsel
4 he has exhibited throughout his tenure in service to the people of the State of Rhode Island; and

5 WHEREAS, Born in Providence, Robert McKenna attended LaSalle Academy. He
6 attained his Bachelor of Arts degree from Brown University, attended the Army Language
7 School, and earned his graduate degree from Catholic University of America in 1962. From 1953
8 until 1956, he served our country as a Russian Linguist in the United States Army; and

9 WHEREAS, Dr. McKenna met and married Mary Jean Kelly and together they raised
10 seven wonderful children. The family made their home in Newport, where Dr. McKenna was
11 employed as a Professor of Politics at Salve Regina – The Newport College. He later served as
12 Professor Emeritus and Assistant to the President until his retirement in 1995; and

13 WHEREAS, His devotion to the people and City of Newport, combined with his passion
14 for public service, made Bob McKenna the ideal candidate for election to the Rhode Island
15 General Assembly, and later, to lead his much-loved community. He served for two terms in the
16 House of Representatives, followed by twelve years in the Rhode Island Senate, representing
17 District 50 in Newport, and culminating in a successful election in 1988 to become Mayor of the
18 “City by the Sea”; and

19 WHEREAS, As a state Senator, Dr. McKenna earned the trust and admiration of his

1 colleagues, as well as his constituents. He was named Chair of the Senate Finance Committee and
2 was a member of the Senate Labor Committee and the Senate Health, Education, and Welfare
3 Committee. He also served on the Rhode Island Heritage Committee and the New England Board
4 of Higher Education, and was Chair of the American and Irish Cultural Exchange Commission;
5 and

6 WHEREAS, Dr. McKenna has received numerous awards and honors for his leadership
7 and management. He was named Grand Marshall of Newport's 350th Anniversary Parade, the 29th
8 Annual Newport St. Patrick's Day Parade, and the National Police Parade. He was selected as an
9 outstanding educator, received the distinguished Service Award from the Mental Health
10 Association of Rhode Island, and was named Legislator of the Year by the Rhode Island Library
11 Association, to name just a few; and

12 WHEREAS, One of the highlights of Dr. McKenna's long history of leadership and
13 public service is his fifteen years of dynamic guidance as Chairman of the Board of Directors of
14 the Rhode Island Student Loan Authority (RISLA), and his three decades of service on the board.
15 He also served as Chair of the Rhode Island Higher Education Assistance Authority; and

16 WHEREAS, During his tenure as chair of RISLA, Dr. McKenna made great strides in
17 expanding the programs and enhancing the resources of the Loan Authority in order to make
18 higher education more accessible and affordable to thousands of Rhode Islanders. He established
19 a program to offer free SAT preparation courses to area high schools, and oversaw the awarding
20 of more than 200,000 loans; allowing 100,000 students to reach their higher education goals. In
21 addition, through the College Planning Center of Rhode Island, which RISLA operates, a variety
22 of reward programs were established for graduates in the fields of teaching, nursing, and
23 pharmacy; and

24 WHEREAS, A founding father of both the Fort Adams Foundation and the Fort Adams
25 Trust, Dr. McKenna serves as Vice Chair of the Foundation and is the Executive Vice President
26 of the Trust, founded in 1994 as a non-profit organization. Fort Adams is an eighty-acre site
27 located on Narragansett Bay. It is the largest coastal fortification in the United States and a
28 National Historic Landmark structure; and

29 WHEREAS, Originally, the Fort Adams site was under the jurisdiction of the United
30 States Navy. Because the Navy was proceeding with plans to demolish the fort and reform the
31 land's usage, a situation that would have proven to be disadvantageous for Rhode Islanders, then
32 State Senator McKenna joined forces with United States Senator Claiborne Pell, providing
33 essential support to wrest the land away from Navy hands. To the immense benefit of our Ocean
34 State, the McKenna-Pell efforts were ultimately successful and resulted in the transfer of Fort

1 Adams' ownership to the state; and

2 WHEREAS, Dr. McKenna's years of dedicated service, his personal and professional
3 integrity, and his faithfulness to the principles and ideals he diligently maintained throughout his
4 lifetime of public service have earned him the unqualified admiration and respect of all who have
5 been privileged enough to work with him; now, therefore be it

6 RESOLVED, That this Senate of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
7 hereby takes great pleasure in recognizing the exceptional service of Dr. Robert McKenna. We
8 furthermore express our profound gratitude for all his efforts to ensure a brighter and more
9 prosperous future for all Rhode Islanders; and be it further

10 RESOLVED, That the Secretary of State be and he hereby is authorized and directed to
11 transmit a duly certified copy of this resolution to The Honorable Robert J. McKenna.

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