

2021-J852

Senate Resolution No. 852

BY: Senator GAUGHRAN

MOURNING the death of legendary former United States Congressman Lester L. Wolff

WHEREAS, It is with profound sorrow and deep regret that this Legislative Body, representing the people of the State of New York, is moved this day to pay tribute to an eminent man of indomitable faith and dedication whose public service and countless accomplishments will forever stand as a paradigm and inspiration for others; and

WHEREAS, Lester L. Wolff, a former New York Congressman who championed President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society programs in the 1960s and America's fight against international drug trafficking in the 1970s, died on Tuesday, May 11, 2021, in Syosset, New York, at the age of 102; and

WHEREAS, Lester L. Wolff was elected to the House of Representatives in 1965, and served as a United States Congressman for 16 years, during which time he co-sponsored the original Medicare law; carried a message from China's paramount leader, Deng Xiaoping, to President Jimmy Carter that led to full Sino-American diplomatic recognition in 1979; and helped expose Indochina's so-called Golden Triangle as a major source of heroin destined for the United States and its troops in Vietnam; and

WHEREAS, Lester Lionel Wolff was born in Manhattan on January 4,

1919, the only child of Samuel and Hannah (Bartman) Wolff; he grew up in Washington Heights, in northern Manhattan, where he attended Public School 189; and

WHEREAS, In a storybook childhood, Lester L. Wolff met Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig at Yankee Stadium and received a baseball for his bar mitzvah signed by the 1932 Yankees, who won the American League pennant and swept the Chicago Cubs in the World Series; and

WHEREAS, After graduating from George Washington High School in 1935 and New York University in 1939, Lester L. Wolff and the former Blanche Silver were united in marriage in 1940; and

WHEREAS, Due to his asthma, Lester L. Wolff was ineligible for service in World War II, but volunteered for the Civil Air Patrol; he flew hundreds of missions over Atlantic coastal waters as a pilot and observer on the lookout for German submarines and the wreckage and survivors of allied ships torpedoed offshore; and

WHEREAS, As one of the wartime patrol's last survivors, Lester L. Wolff received the nation's highest civilian honor, the Congressional Gold Medal, on behalf of the organization in 2014; and

WHEREAS, Upon the completion of his military service, Lester L. Wolff produced and moderated "Between the Lines," a local public-affairs television program; he then began working in marketing and founded the Coordinated Marketing Agency before beginning his illustrious career in politics; and

WHEREAS, As one of his first acts in the House of Representatives, Lester L. Wolff was a sponsor of the Medicare bill; he also voted for such legislative cornerstones as Medicaid and the Voting Rights Act of

1965; and

WHEREAS, Furthermore, throughout eight terms in Congress, his wide-ranging legislative agenda included bills to strengthen Social Security, environmental protections, veterans' benefits, famine relief and assistance for refugees; and

WHEREAS, Locally, this extraordinary congressman led the charge in the 1960s to nix the building of a bridge planned to continue the Seaford-Oyster Bay Expressway in Syosset north to connect with Route 106 through Muttontown, Upper Brookville and Oyster Bay; and

WHEREAS, During this time, Lester L. Wolff contacted the Department of the Interior to survey the area, leading the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Department to declare the 3,209 acres of bay bottom, salt marsh and small freshwater wetland the Oyster Bay National Wildlife Refuge and crushing the plan for the bridge; and

WHEREAS, Lester L. Wolff introduced amendments to the White House sponsored Foreign Assistance Act of 1969 which restored peace talks between Israel and the Arab states; and

WHEREAS, An expert in Asian affairs, Lester L. Wolff served as the chairman of the House International Relations Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs where he led a Congressional delegation to meet with Vice Premier Teng Hsiao-ping on July 9, 1978; and

WHEREAS, Lester L. Wolff co-wrote the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979, which mandated American protections for Taiwan's security, economy and other interests; signed into law by President Carter, it stabilized the American position in Asia; and

WHEREAS, Predeceased by his wife, Lester L. Wolff is survived by his son, Bruce; his daughter, Diane; four grandchildren; six great-grandchildren; and one great-great-grandchild; and

WHEREAS, Every citizen in New York State has most certainly benefited, in one way or another, from the deep dedication, intelligence and commitment that Lester L. Wolff brought to his work as an influential congressman and public policy-maker; a loyal friend and trusted advisor, he will be deeply missed and truly merits the grateful tribute of this Legislative Body; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to mourn the death of Lester L. Wolff, and to express its deepest condolences to his family; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the family of Lester L. Wolff.