

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2023

SENATE RESOLUTION

EXPRESSING CONDOLENCES ON THE PASSING OF EUGENE LEE

Introduced By: Senator Samuel D. Zurier

Date Introduced: February 28, 2023

Referred To: Recommended for Immediate Consideration

1 WHEREAS, It is with deep sadness that this Senate has learned of the passing of Eugene
2 Lee, a very talented and highly honored set designer who worked for "Saturday Night Live",
3 numerous Broadway shows, and the Trinity Repertory Company; and

4 WHEREAS, Mr. Lee was born in Beloit, Wisconsin, with his twin brother, Thomas, to
5 Eugene and Elizabeth Lee. As a young man, he was an Eagle Scout and was introduced to the
6 theater thanks to his high school having a fantastic English teacher and theater facility. He
7 attended the Art Institute of Chicago, Carnegie Mellon University and the Yale School of Drama,
8 earning BFA degrees from the latter two, and an MFA from Yale. He also received honorary
9 PhDs from DePaul University, Rhode Island College, and the Rhode Island School of Design;
10 and

11 WHEREAS, Mr. Lee began his distinguished artistic career in 1967, when he made his
12 debut with Trinity Repertory. The first set he designed was for the production of "The Importance
13 of Being Earnest." He then created more than 100 dazzling sets for Trinity Rep and played a vital
14 role in the sterling reputation Trinity Rep developed, and continues to have, across the globe
15 within the performing arts community; and

16 WHEREAS, Building upon his Providence roots, Mr. Lee moved to New York City
17 where he began a long Broadway collaboration with the late Director-Producer Harold Prince.
18 Their first project together was a revival of Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim's
19 "Candide" which began at the Chelsea Theater and thanks to its success, was quickly moved to
20 Broadway. He earned rave reviews for his sets and for his outstanding work on the "Great White

1 Way", and earned three Tony Awards for "Candide", "Sweeney Todd: The Demon of Barber
2 Street", and for "Wicked"; and

3 WHEREAS; Mr. Lee's work on Broadway caught the attention of Lorne Michaels, who
4 asked him to be a theater designer for his new television show, Saturday Night Live, a
5 collaboration that would last forty years. Whether it was creating sets for various comedy skits,
6 Putin's office, Wayne's World, a podium for Melissa McCarthy, or the More Cowbell set, Mr. Lee
7 produced sets that earned rave reviews and always enhanced the show and the natural talents of
8 the actors using his sets; and

9 WHEREAS, Mr. Lee was nominated for eighteen Primetime Emmy Awards and won six
10 of them. He also collaborated on many projects connected to Saturday Night Live, including
11 "Gilda Live", Simon & Garfunkel's "The Concert in Central Park", and Paul Simon's
12 "Graceland: The African Concert." He also was the person Jimmy Fallon and Seth Myers would
13 turn to when they needed sets designed for their night time shows; and

14 WHEREAS, In recognition of his enormous contribution to American Theater, Mr. Lee
15 was inducted into the American Theater Hall of Fame in 2006. He was described by the current
16 Artistic Director of Trinity Repertory, Curt Columbus, as being a "once-in-a-generation theater
17 artist, one of the greatest minds to ever answer the question, 'What is Theater?'" Mr. Columbus
18 went on to say that Mr. Lee was "simultaneously playful and profound, childlike and rigorous, a
19 genius who sees the world in ways that others can only dream. Every time I worked with Eugene
20 as a designer, my work as a Director became more bold, more expansive and more true. It is one
21 of the greatest honors of my life in the theater that I could call Eugene Lee my collaborator and
22 my friend. Words cannot express how much he will be missed"; and

23 WHEREAS, Mr. Lee leaves behind his wife, Brooke, his sons Willie and Ted, and their
24 wives, Kate and Greta, and his grandchildren, Lucy and Otis. He is also survived by his twin
25 brother, Thomas, his nephew, Graham and his wife, Pam; now, therefore be it

26 RESOLVED, That this Senate of the State of Rhode Island hereby expresses deepest
27 condolences on the passing of Eugene Lee; and be it further

28 RESOLVED, That the Secretary of State be and hereby is authorized and directed to
29 transmit a duly certified copy of this resolution to Mrs. Brooke Lee and family.

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