**A** **SENATE RESOLUTION**

TO RECOGNIZE AND HONOR LIEUTENANT COLONEL SPANN WATSON OF THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE FOR HIS MANY YEARS OF OUTSTANDING MILITARY SERVICE, AND TO DECLARE MAY 16, 2009, AS “MILITARY WAR VETERANS DAY” IN THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA.

Whereas, the members of the South Carolina Senate, on behalf of all South Carolinians, acknowledge with deep appreciation the great sacrifice that the men and women of the United States Armed Forces make for the ideals of freedom and justice, which are so richly enjoyed in this nation; and

Whereas, Lieutenant Colonel Spann Watson of the United States Air Force (Retired) stands high among those servicemen and women so honored by their country; and

Whereas, a native of Johnston, Spann Watson moved with his family to Lodi, New Jersey, in 1927. That same year, he had the privilege of watching world hero Charles A. Lindbergh fly his famous plane, the Spirit of St. Louis, into Teterboro Airport, an event that inspired the young Watson to pursue a career in aviation; and

Whereas, he was educated at Hackensack High School and Howard University, where he studied mechanical engineering. In 1939, he began his aviation training in the original College Pilot Training Program at Howard and continued under the same program at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. In 1941, he joined the United States Army Air Corps as a flying cadet, a pioneer, as part of the Tuskegee airmen experience; he was an original member of the famed 99th Fighter Squadron. During World War II, Spann Watson was one of eight pilots who successfully fought the elite German Luftwaffe over the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Sicily. He also flew missions in Northern Africa, Italy, and Southern Europe; and

Whereas, later in 1944 and 1945, Lieutenant Colonel Watson was assigned to the newly created Combat Crew Training Center for Tuskegee airmen, which was replacing pilots at Walterboro Army Air Field in South Carolina; and

Whereas, continuing to serve his country after the close of World War II, he played an important role in the development of an integration plan for the United States Armed Forces. In recognition of his contributions, his photograph, along with those of other Tuskegee airmen, hangs in the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C.; and

Whereas, after twenty‑three years of military service, he retired from the Air Force as a lieutenant colonel and joined the Federal Aviation Administration as an equal‑opportunity specialist. He continued to build a record of achievement as a specialist in air‑traffic control; and

Whereas, Lieutenant Colonel Watson has received numerous awards for his accomplishments, among them the Department of Transportation’s Exceptional Service citation, granted for his work toward the achievement of equal opportunity, and election as an Elder Statesman of Aviation by the National Aeronautic Association in 1990, as well as election to the board of directors of the association in 1991. He was the first African American to receive these latter two high honors; and

Whereas, Spann Watson has served as national president of the Tuskegee Airmen Incorporated, which he helped organize. When the Columbia chapter of the Tuskegee airmen was granted its charter by the national organization in 2000, the new chapter was named in his honor, and in 2006 Tuskegee University recognized his exceptional achievements by awarding him an honorary doctorate in public service. In 2007, as one of the original Tuskegee airmen, he received a Congressional Gold Medal Award from President George Bush; and

Whereas, the South Carolina Senate counts it a great privilege to honor Lieutenant Colonel Spann Watson, one of the Palmetto State’s finest, and the members with one voice commend the dedicated, sacrificial labors of this worthy son of South Carolina in the military of our great country. Now, therefore,

Be it resolved by the Senate:

That the members of the South Carolina Senate, by this resolution, recognize and honor Lieutenant Colonel Spann Watson of the United States Air Force for his many years of outstanding military service and to declare May 16, 2009, as “Military War Veterans Day” in the State of South Carolina.

Be it further resolved that a copy of this resolution be forwarded to Lieutenant Colonel Spann Watson.

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