**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND THE CODE OF LAWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA, 1976, BY ADDING SECTION 53‑3‑190 SO AS TO RECOGNIZE THE FOURTH THURSDAY IN MARCH AS TUSKEGEE AIRMEN COMMEMORATION DAY.

Whereas, prior to World War II, African Americans had very limited opportunities in the defense of this nation, generally, with no roles in military aviation; and

Whereas, when the United States entered World War II, African Americans greatly desired more meaningful jobs in the military, including flying and maintaining military aircraft; and

Whereas, the rapid expansion of aircraft production during World War II created an urgent need for more trained military pilots; and

Whereas, the public outcry from the Black population, Black media, and fair‑minded whites exhorted the War Department to extend the opportunity to fly airplanes to all members of the military; and

Whereas, the United States War Department’s Civilian Pilot Training (CPT) program authorized colleges and universities to train students to fly, increasing the number of civilian pilots, and thereby, increasing the nation’s military preparedness; and

Whereas, in 1941, Tuskegee Institute in Alabama was one of six Black schools chosen to participate in the CPT program. Following the initiation of the program, the Tuskegee Institute was selected to offer advanced CPT training and ultimately was selected as the sole site for segregated military flight training; and

Whereas, graduates of the CPT program at the Tuskegee Institute became known as Tuskegee Airmen; and

Whereas, the Tuskegee Airmen overcame seemingly insurmountable odds in the form of pervasive racial and legal impediments during the World War II era in order to make their contribution, and the accomplishments of the courageous African‑American pilots of the 99th Pursuit Squadron, as the airmen were officially known, are world renowned; and

Whereas, the achievements of the 99th Pursuit Squadron in combat include, but are not limited to: destruction of 111 aircraft (in the air), destruction of 150 aircraft (on the ground), destruction of 16 barges and boats, 58 box cars and other rolling stock, 57 locomotives, 1 radar installation, and 2 oil and ammunition dumps; and

Whereas, March is a special month for Tuskegee Airmen, as many of their most notable accomplishments occurred in the month of March, including: the first cadets received their wings; the first maintenance crew began training at Chanute Field, Illinois; the activation of the 99th Pursuit Squadron, and in 2007, President George W. Bush presented the Tuskegee Airmen with the Congressional Gold Medal; and

Whereas, many Tuskegee Airmen had direct personal connections to the State of South Carolina, and historic Walterboro Airfield, which housed the 553rd bomber group and served as a training field for replacement pilots for the 332nd fighter group, gives South Carolina a direct link to the gallant service and sacrifices of the Tuskegee Airmen both to the nation and the world. Now, therefore,

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina:

SECTION 1. Chapter 3, Title 53 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding:

“Section 53‑3‑190. The fourth Thursday in March of each year is designated as ‘Tuskegee Airmen Commemoration Day’. This honors the more than fifteen thousand men and women involved in the ‘Tuskegee Experience’, during which the Army Air Corps trained African Americans to fly and maintain combat aircraft. Pilots, navigators, bombardiers, maintenance and support staff, instructors, and all the personnel who kept the planes in the air are all Tuskegee Airmen.”

SECTION 2. This act takes effect upon approval by the Governor.

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