

By Senator Thompson

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1 Senate Resolution

2 A resolution recognizing pioneering aviatrix Bessie  
3 "Queen Bess" Coleman as we celebrate the centennial of  
4 the world's first scheduled commercial airline, the  
5 St. Petersburg-Tampa Airboat Line.

6  
7 WHEREAS, on January 1, 1914, Tony Jannus made aviation  
8 history by flying the Benoist XIV on the inaugural 23-minute  
9 flight of the St. Petersburg-Tampa Airboat Line, the world's  
10 first scheduled commercial airline, and

11 WHEREAS, the events of that day fostered an industry that  
12 has made worldwide travel not only possible, but practical, and

13 WHEREAS, that pioneering flight exemplifies the  
14 entrepreneurial spirit that has evolved into an industry that  
15 has an economic impact in this state of nearly \$100 billion and  
16 in the nation of more than \$1.3 trillion, and

17 WHEREAS, one of those who was inspired by that flight was a  
18 young African-American woman named Bessie Coleman, who had been  
19 regaled by her brothers with tales of French women flying  
20 airplanes during World War I, and

21 WHEREAS, while working as a manicurist in Chicago, Bessie  
22 Coleman met Robert S. Abbott, publisher of The Chicago Defender,  
23 who encouraged her to go to France to study flying and, later,  
24 joined others in sponsoring her in that effort, and

25 WHEREAS, on June 15, 1921, Bessie Coleman received her  
26 license from the prestigious Federation Aeronautique  
27 Internationale (FAI) and became the first African-  
28 American/Native-American female licensed pilot in the world, and

29 WHEREAS, in September 1921, Bessie Coleman returned to a

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30 segregated United States, but nevertheless became a media  
31 sensation, performing in air shows across the country, but only  
32 at venues where the audience was desegregated and everyone  
33 attending used the same entrance gates, and

34 WHEREAS, wanting to make her living as a pilot, Bessie  
35 Coleman returned to Europe for advanced training in acrobatic  
36 flying, returning to the United States in 1922 and living for a  
37 time in Orlando, and

38 WHEREAS, after surviving a plane crash in February 1923, in  
39 which she sustained serious injuries, Bessie Coleman resumed  
40 flying and, the following year, flew in a Texas air show, and

41 WHEREAS, on April 30, 1926, while preparing for a May Day  
42 celebration air show in Jacksonville, Bessie Coleman fell from  
43 her plane 1,000 feet to her death after a loose wrench became  
44 wedged in the open gearbox, causing her mechanic, who was  
45 piloting the plane, to lose control, and

46 WHEREAS, after a well-attended memorial service in  
47 Jacksonville, a funeral was held in Orlando, and Bessie Coleman  
48 was buried in Chicago, where, each year on the anniversary of  
49 her death, African-American aviators, both men and women, fly in  
50 formation over Lincoln Cemetery and drop flowers on her grave,  
51 NOW, THEREFORE,

52  
53 Be It Resolved by the Senate of the State of Florida:

54  
55 That we recognize aviation pioneer Bessie "Queen Bess"  
56 Coleman as we celebrate the centennial of the world's first  
57 scheduled commercial airline flight and remember Bessie  
58 Coleman's contribution to the advancement of minorities and

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59 women on the occasion of the 88th anniversary of her tragic  
60 death and the 100th anniversary of passenger flight that  
61 originated in Florida.