

HR 8015

2023

1 House Resolution

2 A resolution recognizing the service and sacrifice of
3 the Tuskegee Airmen and designating March 23, 2023, as
4 "Tuskegee Airmen Commemoration Day" in Florida.
5

6 WHEREAS, before World War II, African Americans had very
7 limited roles in the defense of the United States and none in
8 military aviation, and when the nation was drawn into the war,
9 African Americans were aspiring to more meaningful jobs in the
10 military, including flying and maintaining aircraft, and

11 WHEREAS, as the rapid expansion of aircraft production
12 during the war created a greater need for military pilots,
13 public outcry from civil rights groups and black professional
14 organizations exhorted the United States War Department to begin
15 training black pilots in the Army Air Corps, and

16 WHEREAS, the United States War Department's Civilian Pilot
17 Training Program (CPTP) authorized colleges and universities to
18 train students in order to increase the number of civilian
19 pilots and thereby increase the nation's military preparedness,
20 and

21 WHEREAS, Alabama's Tuskegee Institute was one of six black
22 colleges and universities chosen to participate in the CPTP, was
23 later selected to offer advanced training, and was the primary
24 flight training facility for the student pilots who would become
25 the Tuskegee Airmen, and

26 WHEREAS, the 99th Fighter Pursuit Squadron, the first black
 27 flying squadron, trained at Dale Mabry Field near Tallahassee to
 28 prepare for combat overseas, and the Eglin Field ranges in
 29 Okaloosa County were used by advanced training cadets for
 30 gunnery practice, and

31 WHEREAS, the outstanding performance of the Tuskegee Airmen
 32 was unprecedented in military aviation history, and

33 WHEREAS, the month of March is significant to the Tuskegee
 34 Airmen, as it is the month in which the first cadets received
 35 their wings; the first maintenance crew began training at
 36 Chanute Field, Illinois; the first Pursuit Squadron, the 99th,
 37 was activated; Eleanor Roosevelt visited Kennedy Field and flew
 38 with Chief Alfred Anderson, an African American Instructor
 39 Pilot; and President George W. Bush presented the Tuskegee
 40 Airmen with the Congressional Gold Medal, and

41 WHEREAS, General Daniel "Chappie" James, Jr., born in
 42 Pensacola, became the first African American to achieve the rank
 43 of four-star general in the Armed Forces; Second Lieutenant
 44 Charles P. Bailey, Sr., born in Punta Gorda, was the first
 45 aviator from Florida to become a Tuskegee Airman pilot of the
 46 99th Fighter Pursuit Squadron; Lieutenant Alvin J. Downing, born
 47 in Jacksonville, was a Special Service Officer and renowned
 48 musician and educator in the Army Air Forces Band and in the St.
 49 Petersburg and Clearwater areas, and

50 WHEREAS, Second Lieutenant Alphonso Simmons from
 51 Jacksonville became a casualty of war on March 3, 1945, and
 52 First Lieutenant James Polkinghorne, Jr., of Pensacola was lost
 53 on a combat mission over Italy on May 5, 1944, and

54 WHEREAS, Lieutenant Colonel George Hardy, residing in
 55 Sarasota County, is a famed "Red Tail" P-51 pilot of the 332nd
 56 Fighter Group; Daniel Keel, residing in Lake County, is one of
 57 only five Tuskegee Airmen to receive a triple airman rating,
 58 serving as pilot, bombardier, and navigator; Raymond Cassagnol,
 59 residing in Seminole County, is one of five Haitian Tuskegee
 60 Airmen pilots; and Callie Odem Gentry, residing in Pasco County,
 61 is a former stenographer and one of the women who served as
 62 support personnel alongside the Tuskegee Airmen, and

63 WHEREAS, Tuskegee Airman Chief Master Sergeant Richard R.
 64 Hall, Jr., of Winter Park was an aircraft mechanic in the 99th
 65 Fighter Pursuit Squadron, served 30 years in the military, and
 66 was one of the first African American Chief Master Sergeants;
 67 and Lieutenant Colonel Robert C. Hughes of Brevard County was a
 68 Caucasian flight instructor, NOW, THEREFORE,

69
 70 Be It Resolved by the House of Representatives of the State of
 71 Florida:

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73 That the House of Representatives recognizes the service
74 and sacrifice of the Tuskegee Airmen and designates March 23,
75 2023, as "Tuskegee Airmen Commemoration Day" in Florida.