

1 A bill to be entitled
 2 An act relating to Tuskegee Airmen Commemoration Day;
 3 amending s. 683.01, F.S.; designating Tuskegee Airmen
 4 Commemoration Day, which occurs on the fourth Thursday
 5 in March, as a legal holiday; providing an effective
 6 date.

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

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

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

23 WHEREAS, Alabama's Tuskegee Institute was one of six black
 24 colleges and universities chosen to participate in the CPTP, was
 25 later selected to offer advanced training, and was the primary

26 | flight training facility for the student pilots who would become
27 | the famed Tuskegee Airmen, and

28 | WHEREAS, the 99th Fighter Pursuit Squadron, the first black
29 | flying squadron, trained at Dale Mabry Field near Tallahassee to
30 | prepare for combat overseas, and the Eglin Field ranges in
31 | Okaloosa County were used by the first class of advanced
32 | training cadets, as well as pilots in the advanced training
33 | stage, for gunnery and combat tactics, and

34 | WHEREAS, the outstanding performance of the Tuskegee Airmen
35 | was unprecedented in military aviation history, and

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

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

51 musician and educator in the Army Air Forces Band and in the St.
 52 Petersburg and Clearwater areas, and

53 WHEREAS, Second Lieutenant Alphonso Simmons of the 100th
 54 Fighter Squadron from Jacksonville became a casualty of war on
 55 March 3, 1945; and the first Tuskegee Airman aviator from
 56 Florida to earn his wings and the first Floridian Tuskegee
 57 Airman of the 301st Fighter Squadron, First Lieutenant James
 58 Polkinghorne, Jr., of Pensacola was a casualty lost on a combat
 59 mission over Italy on May 5, 1944, and

60 WHEREAS, Lieutenant Colonel George E. Hardy, residing in
 61 Sarasota County, is a famed "Red Tail" P-51 pilot of the 332nd
 62 Fighter Group; Lieutenant Daniel K. Keel, Jr., residing in Lake
 63 County, is one of only five triple-rated airmen, serving as
 64 pilot, bombardier, and navigator; and Callie Odom Gentry,
 65 residing in Pasco County, is a female Tuskegee Airman who was a
 66 stenographer during the war, and

67 WHEREAS, Tuskegee Airman Chief Master Sergeant Richard R.
 68 Hall, Jr., formerly of Winter Park, was an aircraft mechanic in
 69 the 99th Fighter Pursuit Squadron, served 30 years in the
 70 military, and was one of the first African American Chief Master
 71 Sergeants; Lieutenant Colonel Robert C. Hughes, formerly of
 72 Brevard County, was a Caucasian flight instructor; and
 73 Lieutenant Raymond Cassagnol, formerly of Seminole County, was
 74 one of five Haitian-born pilots, NOW, THEREFORE,

75

HB 1227

2024

76 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

77

78 Section 1. Paragraphs (h) through (u) of subsection (1) of
79 section 683.01, Florida Statutes, are redesignated as paragraphs
80 (i) through (v), respectively, and new paragraph (h) is added to
81 that subsection, to read:

82 683.01 Legal holidays.—

83 (1) The legal holidays, which are also public holidays,
84 are the following:

85 (h) Tuskegee Airmen Commemoration Day, the fourth Thursday
86 in March.

87 Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2024.