

By Senator Burgess

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A bill to be entitled  
An act relating to the designation of the official  
state flagship; amending s. 15.0465, F.S.;  
redesignating the official state flagship as the S.S.  
American Victory; providing an effective date.

WHEREAS, built in 1944, the S.S. American Victory is one of  
only four operational World War II merchant vessels left in the  
United States and served in World War II, the Korean War, and  
the Vietnam War, and

WHEREAS, the S.S. American Victory is an interactive  
maritime museum located in Tampa, and

WHEREAS, the United States' entry into World War II  
transformed American history and directly affected more than  
250,000 Floridians who served on active duty, and

WHEREAS, of these brave Floridians, more than 3,500 gave  
their lives in defense of the United States during World War II,  
and

WHEREAS, Florida is the ideal location for the S.S.  
American Victory, as the tourism industry caters to nationwide  
visitors who can experience firsthand what it was like to serve  
on board the ship, and

WHEREAS, the S.S. American Victory is a 455-foot steamship  
that was launched on May 24, 1945, during the largest ship-  
building effort in United States history, and

WHEREAS, the S.S. American Victory set sail from the United  
States into the treacherous waters of the Pacific Ocean awaiting  
orders for the invasion of Japan, and

WHEREAS, the S.S. American Victory assisted the war effort

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during the final days of World War II by transporting military equipment, troops, ammunition, and supplies for the Allied Forces, and

WHEREAS, the S.S. American Victory sailed around the world delivering provisions, industrial materials, machinery, and raw materials after the war under the auspices of the Marshall Plan to countries devastated by the destruction of World War II, and

WHEREAS, the S.S. American Victory transported cargo, fuel, and ammunition during the Korean War, and

WHEREAS, the S.S. American Victory repatriated 260 casualties, including three fallen Floridians, Army Private P.C. White, Marine Second Lieutenant Robert C. Craig, and Marine Private First Class Joseph T. Jacobs, to the United States during the Korean War, and

WHEREAS, the S.S. American Victory was reactivated to service in 1966 to support the Vietnam War and conducted 12 voyages supporting the war effort by transporting military equipment, troops, ammunition, and supplies, and

WHEREAS, the S.S. American Victory sailed from the James River Reserve Fleet on March 13, 1985, to participate in the United States' Victory Ship Validation Program, a program designed to gauge the time and expense necessary to reactivate victory-class ships, which enabled the S.S. American Victory to be brought back to full operational status and to perform sea trials after restoration, and

WHEREAS, the S.S. American Victory was then transferred by an act of Congress from the Maritime Administration to The Victory Ship, Inc., in her home port of Tampa, and

WHEREAS, the S.S. American Victory has been a landmark

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59 destination for the past 25 years within Tampa and was  
60 recognized as a National Historic Place in 2002, and

61 WHEREAS, the S.S. American Victory acts as a preeminent  
62 location for military retirement or promotion ceremonies,  
63 marriage ceremonies, and many other types of celebrations, and

64 WHEREAS, the S.S. American Victory actively supports  
65 military charities and foundations such as America's Gold Star  
66 Families, Warrior Ethos, Florida 4 Warriors, The Mission  
67 Continues, the Navy SEAL Foundation, and the Green Beret  
68 Foundation, and

69 WHEREAS, the S.S. American Victory continually supports  
70 community organizations and foundations such as Visit Tampa Bay,  
71 Leadership Florida, Leadership Tampa Bay, Leadership Tampa, the  
72 Maritime Alliance, Propeller Club - Port of Tampa, and Friends  
73 of the Tampa Riverwalk, and

74 WHEREAS, the S.S. American Victory has acted as a primary  
75 platform for thousands of training hours for a wide range of  
76 organizations over her 25 years in Tampa, and

77 WHEREAS, the S.S. American Victory has hosted all branches  
78 of the Department of Defense as well as Special Operations  
79 Command and Central Command; Department of Justice agencies such  
80 as the Federal Bureau of Investigations, the Bureau of Alcohol,  
81 Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, and the Drug Enforcement  
82 Administration; Department of Homeland Security agencies such as  
83 the United States Customs and Border Protection, the United  
84 States Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the United  
85 States Coast Guard; and city, county, and state law enforcement  
86 agencies, and

87 WHEREAS, the S.S. American Victory is visited by tens of

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thousands of guests annually and acts as an educational platform for Tampa Bay's seven-county area as well as for educational programs throughout this state, including AMIkids, the Jefferson High School Maritime, Marine & Environmental Science Academy, the Howard W. Blake High School Maritime Program, the University of South Florida College of Arts and Sciences and Muma College of Business, and various other public schools and home education programs, and

WHEREAS, the S.S. American Victory serves as the homebase for the American Victory Division and other regional Sea Cadet, Boy and Girl Scout, and ROTC programs, and

WHEREAS, the S.S. American Victory also hosts international programs such as the training ship Gunilla, a Swedish vessel that circumnavigates the globe as an international educational platform, and

WHEREAS, the S.S. American Victory is a maritime museum and memorial that is open year-round for visitors of all ages, from across the United States and abroad, supporting Florida's vibrant tourism industry, and

WHEREAS, due to its service to the United States and past 25-year history of service to this state, the official state flagship is redesignated as the S.S. American Victory, NOW, THEREFORE,

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

Section 1. Section 15.0465, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

15.0465 Official state flagship.—The S.S. American Victory,

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117 a 455-foot historic steamship built in 1944 ~~schooner Western~~  
118 ~~Union, a 130-foot historic sailing vessel of the tall ship~~  
119 ~~class, built in Key West and first launched in 1939, is~~  
120 designated the official state flagship.

121 Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2026.