

**By** Senator Burgess

23-01102-26

20261656

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

23-01102-26

20261656

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

23-01102-26

20261656

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

23-01102-26

20261656

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

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

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

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

107 WHEREAS, due to its service to the United States and past  
108 25-year history of service to this state, the official state  
109 flagship is redesignated as the S.S. American Victory, NOW,  
110 THEREFORE,

111  
112 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

113  
114 Section 1. Section 15.0465, Florida Statutes, is amended to  
115 read:

116 15.0465 Official state flagship.—The S.S. American Victory,

23-01102-26

20261656

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.