

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES FINAL BILL ANALYSIS

This bill analysis was prepared by nonpartisan committee staff and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.

BILL #: CS/HB 249	COMPANION BILL: SB 1656 (Burgess)
TITLE: Designation of Official State Flagship	LINKED BILLS: None
SPONSOR(S): Gonzalez Pittman	RELATED BILLS: None

FINAL HOUSE FLOOR ACTION: 114 Y's 0 N's **GOVERNOR'S ACTION:** Approved

SUMMARY

Effect of the Bill:

The bill replaces the schooner Western Union with the S.S. American Victory as the official state flagship.

Fiscal or Economic Impact:

None.

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ANALYSIS

EFFECT OF THE BILL:

The bill redesignates the official state flagship, replacing the current official state flagship, the [schooner Western Union](#), with the [S.S. American Victory](#). (Section [1](#))

The bill was approved by the Governor on April 2, 2026, [ch. 2026-27, L.O.F.](#), and will become effective on July 1, 2026. (Section [2](#))

RELEVANT INFORMATION

SUBJECT OVERVIEW:

State Designations

Current law designates 43 state symbols as the official symbols of the state. These range from the official state anthem ("Florida, Where the Sawgrass Meets the Sky")¹ to the official state honey (tupelo),² to the state marine mammal (manatee).³ The list of designations also includes the official state flagship, the schooner Western Union.⁴

[Schooner Western Union](#)

The schooner Western Union was designated as the official state flagship by the Legislature in 2012.⁵ Before that, the ship was named as the official flagship of Key West in 1997.⁶ The schooner is a 130-foot vintage, wooden, sailing vessel of the tall ship class, made of mahogany and yellow pine. Construction of the schooner was completed in Key West on April 7, 1939.⁷ For 35 years, the schooner served as a cable vessel for the Western Union Telegraph Company, laying and maintaining undersea telegraph cable throughout Key West, Cuba, and the Caribbean.⁸ Over that time, the ship logged over 30,000 miles in service of the company.⁹ After being retired from service with the

¹ [S. 15.0326, F.S.](#)

² [S. 15.0521, F.S.](#)

³ [S. 15.038\(1\), F.S.](#)

⁴ [S. 15.0465, F.S.](#)

⁵ Ch. 2012-158, F.S., codified as [s. 15.0465, F.S.](#)

⁶ Key West Weekly, [Keys History: Historic Schooner Dry Docked on Stock Island Has Seen Better Days](#), (last visited January 23, 2026).

⁷ Key West Historic Marker Tour, [Schooner Western Union](#), (last visited January 23, 2026).

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

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Western Union Telegraph Company, the schooner was used as a charter boat and in various events celebrating the United States' Bicentennial. The ship was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1984.¹⁰

In 2007, the schooner was donated to the Schooner Western Union Preservation Society, Inc., whose mission was to “restore and maintain the historic vessel to benefit the local community and for education and outreach programs.”¹¹ As of 2024, after falling into disrepair and after several failed attempts to restore the ship to seaworthiness, the ship sat without its masts and riggings, dry docked at a privately owned marina in Key West.¹²

[S.S. American Victory](#)

Constructed in just 55 days in the closing months of World War II, the S.S. American Victory, which was named after American University in Washington, D.C., was launched on May 24, 1945, at the California Shipyard in Los Angeles, California.¹³ The S.S. American Victory—455 feet in length and powered by steam turbine engines—was among a fleet of 534 “Victory” ships, merchant ships built to transport troops and cargo in what is considered to be the largest sealift in history.¹⁴ Her inaugural and sole mission of World War II was the delivery of critical cargo from Fort Mason, California to troops stationed in Manila, Philippines.¹⁵ After the war, the ship was chartered by American Export Lines as a transport for food and machinery to Europe, Russia, and Asia under the Marshall Plan.¹⁶ The ship continued her service during the Korean War, supplying American and United Nations troops. After the Korean War, the S.S. American Victory was deactivated and anchored in Orange, Texas. In 1966, she was brought back into service and transported cargo and troops throughout the Vietnam War.¹⁷

Between 1969 and 1999, the S.S. American Victory was effectively mothballed until Captain John C. Timmel purchased the boat, after the title was transferred by the 105th Congress, and delivered her to Tampa Bay.¹⁸ Since 2003, the S.S. American Victory has served as a museum and mariner’s memorial. Of the 534 Victory ships built, the S.S. American Victory is one of only three left.¹⁹

¹⁰ National Register of Historic Places, [Digital Archive](#), (last visited January 23, 2026).

¹¹ Key West Weekly, [Keys History: Historic Schooner Dry Docked on Stock Island Has Seen Better Days](#), (last visited January 23, 2026).

¹² *Id.*

¹³ The American Victory Ship and Museum, [Mission and History](#) (last visited January 23, 2026).

¹⁴ U.S. Naval Institute, [SS American Victory, Tampa, Florida](#) (last visited January 23, 2026).

¹⁵ The American Victory Ship and Museum, [Mission and History](#) (last visited January 23, 2026).

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ Fox13 Tampa Bay, [At 76 Years of Age, the SS American Victory Lives on in Tampa](#) (last visited, January 23, 2026).