

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 440

Commending the Tuskegee Airmen on their courageous and exemplary service to the nation.

Agreed to by the Senate, February 12, 2009
 Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 20, 2009

WHEREAS, in June 1941, during the height of World War II, the 66th Air Force Contract Flying School was established at Tuskegee Institute, founded by Dr. Booker T. Washington, to train highly dedicated and determined young African American enlisted men as America's first African American aviators; and

WHEREAS, these courageous, intelligent, and patriotic young men represented every area of the nation, and each one possessed a strong personal desire to serve the United States to the best of his ability; and

WHEREAS, African American aviators were trained at Tuskegee Army Air Field (TAAF) as single-engine and multi-engine pilots, and the first aviation cadet class began in July 1941 and completed training nine months later in March 1942; and

WHEREAS, the first class of aviation graduates included Captain Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., a West Point graduate, who later served as the commander of the famous 332nd Fighter Group, and four graduates who were commissioned second lieutenants; all five received Army Air Corps silver pilot wings; and

WHEREAS, from 1941 to 1946, 994 pilots graduated from TAAF and received commissions and pilot wings; the Tuskegee Airmen also included enlisted African American men who became navigators, bombardiers, gunnery crews, aircraft and engine mechanics, armament specialists, radio repairmen, parachute riggers, control tower operators, policemen, and administrative clerks, all of whom were trained in the necessary skills to function fully as an Army Air Corps flying squadron or ground support unit; and

WHEREAS, of the pilots trained at Tuskegee Institute, 450 men saw combat as members of the 99th Fighter Squadron or the 332nd Fighter Group; the 99th Fighter Squadron, which trained at Tuskegee Institute, flew more than 1500 missions in Europe and North Africa, and no bomber escorted by the Tuskegee Airmen was lost to enemy fire—the 99th Fighter Squadron is the only United States squadron to hold that distinction during World War II; and

WHEREAS, the outstanding record of African American pilots who served the United States during World War II was accomplished by men who accepted their country's call and the challenge to service, while enduring the humiliation and indignity of racism and bigotry at home and abroad; and

WHEREAS, these brave men, upon returning home to the United States, faced unrelenting racial discrimination despite their outstanding war record; nevertheless, many of them elected to remain in the Armed Services although their assignments were limited to the 332nd Fighter Group or the 477th Composite Group, and despite their continued superb performance as aviators, opportunities for advancement and promotion were very limited due to racial segregation; and

WHEREAS, the unparalleled feats of patriotism and bravery of the Tuskegee Airmen, their outstanding accomplishments, tenacity, and unblemished record of decorous conduct even in the face of rabid racial animus contributed to the desegregation of the United States military in 1948, and were important factors in the initiation of the historic social change to achieve racial equality in America; and

WHEREAS, Virginia was the native home of several of the Tuskegee Airmen, the nation's first African American military aviators, and four surviving members of this renowned group of veterans are residents of the Commonwealth today; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend the Tuskegee Airmen on their courageous and exemplary service to the nation; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to Ezram M. Hill, Sr., requesting that he further disseminate copies of this resolution to the families and surviving members of the Tuskegee Airmen, as an expression of the General Assembly's deep respect and admiration of their heroism, patriotism, sacrifices, and contributions to the citizens of this Commonwealth and the nation.

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