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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 251

Offered January 11, 2023

Prefiled January 10, 2023

Acknowledging with profound regret the denial of benefits under the G.I. Bill to Black World War II veterans.

Patrons—Lucas and McClellan

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, more than 1.2 million Black Americans served in World War II, putting their lives at risk in what remains the deadliest conflict in human history in order to defend freedom abroad and at home; and

WHEREAS, Black citizens and service members served the war effort in myriad ways; all-Black segregated military units, including the Tuskegee Airmen, the Barrage Balloon Battalion, the 761st Tank Battalion also known as the Black Panthers, and the Fifth Army's 92nd Infantry Division or "Buffalo Soldiers," among many others, served in combat in some of the war's hardest-fought battles and are remembered today for their heroism and sacrifice; however, before they could even fight for their country, Black service members had to fight for the right to see combat; and

WHEREAS, even as they fought injustice and tyranny abroad, Black American citizens were denied rights in their own nation and were subject to segregation, systematic injustice, and racial violence in America; many Black American service members found that they faced less discrimination abroad than in their own hometowns and others found, on the home front, that Nazi prisoners of war were subject to less discrimination in America than were Black citizens; and

WHEREAS, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, known as the G.I. Bill, was enacted to assist World War II veterans in their return to civilian life after the war and brought substantial economic and educational benefits to nearly eight million World War II veterans; the G.I. Bill is frequently credited with creating the American middle class by offering free college and other educational opportunities, removing barriers to getting a home loan, and creating employment opportunities for veterans; and

WHEREAS, the G.I. Bill, as enacted, was passed to benefit all veterans of the war, but with little federal oversight, the states and institutions administering the G.I. Bill had the power to distribute its benefits disproportionately to white veterans; in many states where Jim Crow segregation was still in full effect, legal and societal barriers prevented Black veterans from taking advantage of the G.I. Bill's benefits; and

WHEREAS, through denial of loans, redlining, nonacceptance into universities on the basis of race, and other systematic barriers, Black veterans were denied the opportunities to prosper that they should have been able to claim with the same ease with which white veterans were able to claim these opportunities; and

WHEREAS, the harm done to Black veterans in blocking them from receiving a wide range of social benefits persists today, with longstanding educational, economic, and housing inequality that has amplified over the generations since World War II; and

WHEREAS, the most abject apology for past wrongs cannot right them; yet the spirit of true repentance on behalf of a government and, through it, a people can promote reconciliation and healing and avert the repetition of past wrongs and the disregard of manifested injustices; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, by the Senate of Virginia, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly acknowledge with profound regret the denial of benefits under the G.I. Bill to Black World War II veterans. In acknowledging this injustice, the General Assembly expresses its support for measures toward rectification of the harm committed against Black World War II veterans; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate transmit a copy of this resolution to the Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs, the Chief Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion Officer, the Executive Director of the Virginia State Conference NAACP, and the Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Virginia, requesting that they further disseminate copies of this resolution to their respective constituents so that they may be apprised of the sense of the General Assembly of Virginia in this matter.

INTRODUCED

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