

109TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

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To authorize the President to award a gold medal on behalf of Congress, collectively, to the Tuskegee Airmen in recognition of their unique military record, which inspired revolutionary reform in the Armed Forces.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. LEVIN (for himself, Mr. MCCAIN, Ms. STABENOW, Mrs. DOLE, Mr. OBAMA, Mr. GRAHAM, Mr. PRYOR, Mr. KENNEDY, Mr. ROCKEFELLER, Ms. LANDRIEU, Mr. NELSON of Florida, and Mr. KERRY) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on

A BILL

To authorize the President to award a gold medal on behalf of Congress, collectively, to the Tuskegee Airmen in recognition of their unique military record, which inspired revolutionary reform in the Armed Forces.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. FINDINGS.**

4 Congress finds the following:

5 (1) In 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt
6 overruled his top generals and ordered the creation
7 of an all Black flight training program. President

1 Roosevelt took this action one day after the NAACP
2 filed suit on behalf of Howard University student
3 Yancy Williams and others in Federal court to force
4 the Department of War to accept Black pilot train-
5 ees. Yancy Williams had a civilian pilot's license and
6 had earned an engineering degree. Years later,
7 Major Yancy Williams participated in an air surveil-
8 lance project created by President Dwight D. Eisen-
9 hower.

10 (2) Due to the rigid system of racial segrega-
11 tion that prevailed in the United States during
12 World War II, Black military pilots were trained at
13 a separate airfield built near Tuskegee, Alabama.
14 They became known as the "Tuskegee Airmen".

15 (3) The Tuskegee Airmen inspired revolu-
16 tionary reform in the Armed Forces, paving the way
17 for full racial integration in the Armed Forces. They
18 overcame the enormous challenges of prejudice and
19 discrimination, succeeding, despite obstacles that
20 threatened failure.

21 (4) From all accounts, the training of the
22 Tuskegee Airmen was an experiment established to
23 prove that so-called "coloreds" were incapable of op-
24 erating expensive and complex combat aircraft.
25 Studies commissioned by the Army War College be-

1 tween 1924 and 1939 concluded that Blacks were
2 unfit for leadership roles and incapable of aviation.
3 Instead, the Tuskegee Airmen excelled.

4 (5) Overall, some 992 Black pilots graduated
5 from the pilot training program of the Tuskegee
6 Army Air Field, with the last class finishing in June
7 1946, 450 of whom served in combat. The first class
8 of cadets began in July 1941 with 13 airmen, all of
9 whom had college degrees, some with Ph.D.'s, and
10 all of whom had pilot's licenses. One of the grad-
11 uates was Captain Benjamin O. Davis Jr., a United
12 States Military Academy graduate. Four aviation ca-
13 dets were commissioned as second lieutenants, and
14 5 received Army Air Corps silver pilot wings.

15 (6) That the experiment achieved success rather
16 than the expected failure is further evidenced by the
17 eventual promotion of 3 of these pioneers through
18 the commissioned officer ranks to flag rank, includ-
19 ing the late General Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., United
20 States Air Force, the late General Daniel "Chappie"
21 James, United States Air Force, our Nation's first
22 Black 4-star general, and Major General Lucius
23 Theus, United States Air Force (retired).

24 (7) Four hundred fifty Black fighter pilots
25 under the command of then Colonel Benjamin O.

1 Davis, Jr., fought in World War II aerial battles
2 over North Africa, Sicily, and Europe, flying, in suc-
3 cession, P-40, P-39, P-47, and P-51 aircraft. These
4 gallant men flew 15,553 sorties and 1,578 missions
5 with the 12th Tactical Air Force and the 15th Stra-
6 tegic Air Force.

7 (8) Colonel Davis later became the first Black
8 flag officer of the United States Air Force, retired
9 as a 3-star general, and was honored with a 4th star
10 in retirement by President William J. Clinton.

11 (9) German pilots, who both feared and re-
12 spected the Tuskegee Airmen, called them the
13 “Schwartzze Vogelmenshen” (or “Black Birdmen”).
14 White American bomber crews reverently referred to
15 them as the “Black Redtail Angels”, because of the
16 bright red painted on the tail assemblies of their
17 fighter aircraft and because of their reputation for
18 not losing bombers to enemy fighters as they pro-
19 vided close escort for bombing missions over stra-
20 tegic targets in Europe.

21 (10) The 99th Fighter Squadron, after having
22 distinguished itself over North Africa, Sicily, and
23 Italy, joined 3 other Black squadrons, the 100th, the
24 301st, and the 302nd, designated as the 332nd
25 Fighter Group. They then comprised the largest

1 fighter unit in the 15th Air Force. From Italian
2 bases, they destroyed many enemy targets on the
3 ground and at sea, including a German destroyer in
4 strafing attacks, and they destroyed numerous
5 enemy aircraft in the air and on the ground.

6 (11) Sixty-six of these pilots were killed in com-
7 bat, while another 32 were either forced down or
8 shot down and captured to become prisoners of war.
9 These Black airmen came home with 150 Distin-
10 guished Flying Crosses, Bronze Stars, Silver Stars,
11 and Legions of Merit, one Presidential Unit Cita-
12 tion, and the Red Star of Yugoslavia.

13 (12) Other Black pilots, navigators, bombard-
14 iers and crewman who were trained for medium
15 bombardment duty as the 477th Bomber Group
16 (Medium) were joined by veterans of the 332nd
17 Fighter Group to form the 477th Composite Group,
18 flying the B-25 and P-47 aircraft. The demands of
19 the members of the 477th Composite Group for par-
20 ity in treatment and for recognition as competent
21 military professionals, combined with the magnifi-
22 cent wartime records of the 99th Fighter Squadron
23 and the 332nd Fighter Group, led to a review of the
24 racial policies of the Department of War.

1 (13) In September 1947, the United States Air
2 Force, as a separate service, reactivated the 332d
3 Fighter Group under the Tactical Air command.
4 Members of the 332d Fighter Group were “Top
5 Guns” in the 1st annual Air Force Gunnery Meet in
6 1949.

7 (14) For every Black pilot there were 12 other
8 civilian or military Black men and women per-
9 forming ground support duties. Many of these men
10 and women remained in the military service during
11 the post-World War II era and spearheaded the inte-
12 gration of the Armed Forces of the United States.

13 (15) Major achievements are attributed to
14 many of those who returned to civilian life and
15 earned leadership positions and respect as business-
16 men, corporate executives, religious leaders, lawyers,
17 doctors, educators, bankers, and political leaders.

18 (16) A period of nearly 30 years of anonymity
19 for the Tuskegee Airmen was ended in 1972 with
20 the founding of Tuskegee Airmen, Inc., in Detroit,
21 Michigan. Organized as a non-military and nonprofit
22 entity, Tuskegee Airmen, Inc., exists primarily to
23 motivate and inspire young Americans to become
24 participants in our Nation’s society and its demo-

1 cratic process, and to preserve the history of their
2 legacy.

3 (17) The Tuskegee Airmen have several memo-
4 rials in place to perpetuate the memory of who they
5 were and what they accomplished, including—

6 (A) the Tuskegee Airmen, Inc., National
7 Scholarship Fund for high school seniors who
8 excel in mathematics, but need financial assist-
9 ance to begin a college program;

10 (B) a museum in historic Fort Wayne in
11 Detroit, Michigan;

12 (C) Memorial Park at the Air Force Mu-
13 seum at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in
14 Dayton, Ohio;

15 (D) a statue of a Tuskegee Airman in the
16 Honor Park at the United States Air Force
17 Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado; and

18 (E) a National Historic Site at Moton
19 Field, where primary flight training was per-
20 formed under contract with the Tuskegee Insti-
21 tute.

22 **SEC. 2. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL.**

23 (a) PRESENTATION AUTHORIZED.—The President is
24 authorized to award to the Tuskegee Airmen, on behalf
25 of Congress, a gold medal of appropriate design honoring

1 the Tuskegee Airmen in recognition of their unique mili-
2 tary record, which inspired revolutionary reform in the
3 Armed Forces.

4 (b) DESIGN AND STRIKING.—For the purposes of the
5 award referred to in subsection (a), the Secretary of the
6 Treasury (hereafter in this Act referred to as the “Sec-
7 retary”) shall strike a gold medal with suitable emblems,
8 devices, and inscriptions, to be determined by the Sec-
9 retary.

10 **SEC. 3. DUPLICATE MEDALS.**

11 Under such regulations as the Secretary may pre-
12 scribe, the Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in
13 bronze of the gold medal struck under section 2, at a price
14 sufficient to cover the costs of the medals, including labor,
15 materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses.

16 **SEC. 4. NATIONAL MEDALS.**

17 Medals struck pursuant to this Act are national med-
18 als for purposes of chapter 51 of title 31, United States
19 Code.

20 **SEC. 5. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS; PROCEEDS**
21 **OF SALE.**

22 (a) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
23 authorized to be charged against the United States Mint
24 Public Enterprise Fund, an amount not to exceed \$30,000

1 to pay for the cost of the medals authorized under section
2 2.

3 (b) PROCEEDS OF SALE.—Amounts received from the
4 sale of duplicate bronze medals under section 3 shall be
5 deposited in the United States Mint Public Enterprise
6 Fund.