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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION

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WHEREAS, Interstate 57 is a major thoroughfare in the United States interstate system of roads which, in part, is situated through sections of the south side of Chicago and through the City of Rantoul, tracing along the route of the former Illinois Central railroad line; and

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WHEREAS, The "Tuskegee Airmen" is the popular name of a group of African American pilots who fought in World War II; formally, they were the 332nd Fighter Group and the 477th Bombardment Group of the U.S. Army Air Corps; the Tuskegee Airmen were dedicated, determined young men who enlisted to become America's first black military airmen; and

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WHEREAS, The Tuskegee Airmen were the first African American military aviators in the United States Armed Forces; during World War II, African Americans in many U.S. states were still subject to racist Jim Crow laws; the American military was no exception, as it too was racially segregated along with much of the federal government; the Tuskegee Airmen were subject to racial discrimination, both within and outside the Army; despite these adversities, they trained and flew with distinction; each of the men possessed a strong personal desire to serve the United States to the best of his ability; and

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1           WHEREAS, By the spring of 1944 the all-black 332nd Fighter  
2 Group had been sent overseas with three fighter squadrons: the  
3 100th, 301st and 302nd; these squadrons were moved to mainland  
4 Italy, where the 99th Fighter Squadron, assigned to the group  
5 on May 1, 1944, joined them on June 6, at Rarnitelli Airfield,  
6 near Termoli, on the Adriatic coast; from Rarnitelli, the 332nd  
7 Fighter Group escorted the Fifteenth Air Force heavy strategic  
8 bombing raids into Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, Poland,  
9 and Germany; flying escort for heavy bombers, the 332nd earned  
10 an impressive combat record; the Allies called these airmen  
11 "Red Tails" or "Red-Tail Angels" because of the distinctive  
12 crimson paint predominately applied on the tail section of the  
13 unit's aircraft; these assignments marked the first aerial  
14 combat missions ever carried out by African American pilots;  
15 and

16           WHEREAS, 996 pilots in total were trained in Tuskegee from  
17 1941 to 1946, approximately 445 were deployed overseas, and 150  
18 Airmen lost their lives in accidents or combat; the blood cost  
19 included 66 pilots killed in action or accidents, and 32 fallen  
20 into captivity as prisoners of war; the Tuskegee Airmen were  
21 credited by higher commands with the following  
22 accomplishments:

23                   15,533 combat sorties and 1578 missions;

24                   112 German aircraft destroyed in the air and another  
25                   150 on the ground;

1           950 railcars, trucks, and other motor vehicles  
2 destroyed;

3           One destroyer sunk by P-47 machine gun fire;

4           A nearly perfect record of not losing U.S. bombers; and

5           WHEREAS, Awards and decorations awarded for valor and  
6 performance included:

7           Three Distinguished Unit Citations (99th Pursuit  
8 Squadron: May 30-June 11, 1943 for the capture of  
9 Pantelleria, Italy; 99th Fighter Squadron: May 12-14, 1944  
10 for successful air strikes against Monte Cassino, Italy;  
11 and 332d Fighter Group: March 24, 1945 for the longest  
12 bomber escort mission of World War II);

13           At least one Silver Star;

14           An estimated 150 Distinguished Flying Crosses;

15           14 Bronze Stars;

16           744 Air Medals;

17           8 Purple Hearts; and

18           WHEREAS, After the end of World War II, black airmen  
19 returned to the United States and once again faced racism and  
20 hatred, despite their outstanding service record; and

21           WHEREAS, These brave men deserve to be recognized by the  
22 State of Illinois for their service to their country during  
23 wartime; and

1           WHEREAS, Kentucky became the first state to honor the  
2 Tuskegee Airmen when it named U.S. Interstate 75 the "Tuskegee  
3 Airmen Memorial Trail" in 2010; and

4           WHEREAS, Rantoul is the location of Chanute Field, where  
5 the first unit of the Tuskegee Airmen, the 99th Pursuit  
6 Squadron, was activated on March 19, 1941; over 250 enlisted  
7 men were trained at Chanute in aircraft ground support trades  
8 before all operations were moved to Tuskegee, Alabama;  
9 therefore, be it

10           RESOLVED, BY THE SENATE OF THE NINETY-NINTH GENERAL  
11 ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
12 CONCURRING HEREIN, that we designate the section of Interstate  
13 57 between Exit 250 at U.S. Route 136 in Rantoul and Exit 358  
14 at Wentworth Avenue in Chicago as the Tuskegee Airmen Memorial  
15 Trail; and be it further

16           RESOLVED, That the Illinois Department of Transportation  
17 is requested to erect at suitable locations, consistent with  
18 State and federal regulations, appropriate plaques or signs  
19 giving notice of the name of the Tuskegee Airmen Memorial  
20 Trail; and be it further

21           RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be

1 presented to the Secretary of the Illinois Department of  
2 Transportation and the Chicago "DODO" Chapter of the Tuskegee  
3 Airmen, Incorporated.