

By: Ellzey

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R E S O L U T I O N

1 WHEREAS, Texas has been home to many stellar aviation  
2 pioneers through the years, but few stars burned as brightly as that  
3 of the legendary aviator Bessie Coleman; and

4 WHEREAS, One of 13 children in a family of sharecroppers,  
5 Bessie Coleman was born in Atlanta, Texas, on January 26, 1892, and  
6 grew up in Waxahachie; despite the hardship of working in the cotton  
7 fields, she received an eighth-grade education in a one-room school  
8 and became an avid reader; her imagination was especially fired by  
9 reading the story of Harriet Quimby, the first American woman to  
10 earn a pilot's license and the first woman to fly solo across the  
11 English Channel; and

12 WHEREAS, Ms. Coleman enrolled in the Colored Agricultural  
13 and Normal University in Langston, Oklahoma, in 1910, but she was  
14 forced to drop out after one term due to a lack of funds; she settled  
15 in Chicago in 1915 and found work as a manicurist on the South Side;  
16 when one of her brothers returned from Europe after World War I and  
17 regaled her with stories about female pilots in France, she became  
18 even more determined to learn to fly; and

19 WHEREAS, With the support of Robert Abbott, an African  
20 American newspaper publisher, she applied to aviation schools  
21 across the United States but was denied admission because of her  
22 race and gender; undeterred, she learned French and moved to Paris  
23 in 1919, where she enrolled in flight school and became part of the  
24 Black American expatriate scene, making friends with such

1 luminaries as the dancer Josephine Baker; in 1921, she became the  
2 first African American woman to become a licensed aviator when she  
3 received her international pilot's license from the Fédération  
4 Aéronautique Internationale; and

5         WHEREAS, Returning to the United States, Ms. Coleman was once  
6 again denied work as a pilot because she was a Black woman, so she  
7 became a barnstormer, one of the daring, itinerant aviators who  
8 traveled from town to town across the nation, performing  
9 spectacular aerial stunts at air shows that drew as many as 30,000  
10 spectators; she also gave lectures and established a beauty shop in  
11 Orlando, Florida, in order to raise money to open her own aviation  
12 school to train Black pilots, and as she traveled the country, she  
13 refused to perform unless the air show audiences were desegregated,  
14 with everyone entering by the same gates; and

15         WHEREAS, Ms. Coleman eventually purchased her own aircraft,  
16 a Curtiss JN-4 "Jenny," and she was testing it with her mechanic in  
17 Jacksonville, Florida, on April 30, 1926, when the plane  
18 malfunctioned and she fell to her death; her funeral in Chicago was  
19 attended by 15,000 people, with a eulogy by the civil rights  
20 activist Ida B. Wells; and

21         WHEREAS, In 1929, William J. Powell founded the Bessie  
22 Coleman Aero Club in Los Angeles, a flight school that trained some  
23 of the pilots who went on to serve with the Tuskegee Airmen during  
24 World War II, and in 1931, the Challenger Air Pilots Association of  
25 Chicago began an annual flight over the cemetery where she was  
26 buried; women aviators in Chicago established the Bessie Coleman  
27 Aviators Club in 1977, and in 1995, the U.S. Postal Service issued a

1 stamp in her honor; she was inducted into the National Aviation Hall  
2 of Fame in 2006; and

3 WHEREAS, At a time when the aspirations of Black women were  
4 impeded by racism and sexism, Bessie Coleman fulfilled her ambition  
5 to become a pilot through courage and fierce determination, and she  
6 helped inspire generations of women and African Americans, in the  
7 Lone Star State and across the nation, to dream of taking to the  
8 skies; now, therefore, be it

9 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives of the 87th Texas  
10 Legislature hereby pay tribute to the legacy of pioneering aviator  
11 Bessie Coleman.