

CELEBRATING THE LIFE OF HARLEM'S TUSKEGEE AIRMAN JOSEPH HERMAN SPOONER

### HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, December 2, 2014*

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the life of Tuskegee Airman Joseph Herman Spooner, a life-long resident of the Village of Harlem. As noted by the family: On September 11th, 2014, America surrendered a living legend to the annals of Black American history. Inextricably intertwined to the importance of this day "September 11th" in American history, a Tuskegee Airman at 94 years old, has passed over.

September 11 reminds all of us every year that 'freedom is not free' and the strength of our nation depends on men and women, such as Joe Spooner, a decorated World War II original member of the 99th Fighter Squadron/332 Fighter Group stationed out of Tuskegee, Alabama.

Joseph Spooner was born on October 30th, 1919 to Joseph and Georgianna Spooner. Joseph was hilarious and loved to play jokes on people. He was high spirited and the life of the party. He had 6 children and three generations of grandchildren. He attended PS 179 Elementary School, PS 165 Robert E. Simon, and graduated from Dewitt Clinton High School in which he excelled in academics and athletics. He loved to play and watch sports. In his early years, he played Semi-Pro Basketball on a team called the Columbians.

At the time he was drafted Joseph Spooner was a freshman at The City College of New York. Having played with the likes of Negro Basketball League legend John Issacs and "Pop" Gates of the original Harlem Globetrotters he made his family proud qualifying to pursue a college education during such a racially charged and segregated time period. America in the 1940's, was unforgiving for people of color, it was an impossible dream come true, yet a dream deferred. Joseph Spooner left college, abandoning a basketball scholarship to serve his country.

Joe enlisted into service in 1942, and in 1943 this Black American hero was commissioned for duty with the Tuskegee Airmen. On April 1943, the 99th Fighter Squadron in their P-47 Thunderbolt fighters went into combat bound for North Africa, where it would join the 33rd Fighter Group and its commander, Colonel William W. Momyer. Given little guidance from battle-experienced pilots, the 99th's first combat mission was to attack the small strategic volcanic island of Pantelleria in the Mediterranean Sea to clear the sea lanes for the Allied invasion of Sicily in July 1943. The air assault on the island began on 30 May 1943. The 99th flew its first combat mission on June 2, 1943. The surrender of the garrison of 11,121 Italians and 78 Germans due to air attack was the first of its kind.

The 99th moved on to Sicily and received a Distinguished Unit Citation for its performance in combat led by Col. Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., Commander of the Tuskegee Airmen 332nd Fighter Group. Though subject to racial discrimination, both at home and abroad, the 996 pilots and more than 15,000 ground personnel who served with the all-black units would be credited with some 15,500 combat sorties and

earn over 150 Distinguished Flying Crosses for their achievements. With over 200 combat missions the Tuskegee Airmen did not lose a single bomber. They did everything in their power to protect and shield the bombers.

As American history has now recognized the heroism and amazing exploits and air battles that took place in the skies over Europe by the 99th Fighter Squadron/332 Fighter Group, Joe as Armorer may have had the most important role by which he was responsible for loading the fighter planes with ammunition. In 2006, I introduced legislation to honor the Tuskegee Airmen with the Congressional Gold Medal. In March of 2007, Tuskegee Airman Joseph Herman Spooner received the Congressional Gold Medal of Honor from President George W. Bush

Great men, like our beloved Tuskegee Airman Joseph Herman Spooner are temporary gifts we have in this world, but their accomplishments and achievements are far remembered and forever lasting. Mr. Speaker, I ask my distinguished colleagues to join me in celebrating the life of Tuskegee Airman Joseph Herman Spooner.

#### HISTORICAL RECORD OF SENATE AND HOUSE HEARINGS ON FALEOMAVAEGA'S BILL TO PROTECT VOTING RIGHTS OF AMERICAN SAMOA'S ACTIVE DUTY SERVICE MEMBERS AND OVERSEAS VOTERS

### HON. ENI F.H. FALEOMAVAEGA

OF AMERICAN SAMOA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, December 2, 2014*

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to include, for historical purposes, information on Senate and House hearings on a bill to protect the voting rights of American Samoa's active duty service members and overseas voters.

[Press Release, July 14, 2004]

#### SENATE HOLDS HEARING ON FALEOMAVAEGA BILL TO PROTECT VOTING RIGHTS OF ACTIVE DUTY SERVICE MEMBERS AND OVERSEAS VOTERS

Congressman Faleomavaega announced today that the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests held a hearing on H.R. 2010, a bill he introduced to protect the voting rights of active duty service members and overseas voters whose home of residence is American Samoa.

At this time, I want to thank Chairman Larry Craig and Ranking Member Ron Wyden for holding this hearing and for entering the full text of my statement into the record, Congressman Faleomavaega said. I also want to thank Senator Daniel Akaka who is a senior member of both the Energy Committee and the Subcommittee on Public Lands. Senator Akaka was instrumental in getting this hearing held and I thank him for his support and kind words.

At today's hearing, Senator Akaka said, "H.R. 2010 was introduced by my good friend, Eni Faleomavaega, a senior member of the House who couldn't testify himself because of the centennial celebration for the islands of Manua. On this occasion, I'd like to send the people of American Samoa our best wishes as they celebrate the 100th anniversary since the stars and stripes were first raised by their traditional chiefs."

Senator Akaka continued by saying, "I do not have a question, Mr. Chairman, but a comment as someone who is very familiar with the challenges of transportation and communications out in the Pacific. This bill would resolve a long-standing problem in electing the Delegate from American Samoa: How to conduct a run-off election in just 14 days in a territory with a very large number of absentee voters and only two regular flights from the U.S. each week? This bill would provide for election of the Delegate by a plurality vote. Or, if the local government wants, by a majority vote following a primary election. It would resolve a long-standing problem."

Chairman Craig thanked Senator Akaka for his opening comments and I also thank Senator Akaka for being at today's hearing. Although I was invited to testify before the Senate Subcommittee, I thought it was equally important to attend Flag Day celebrations being held in American Samoa to recognize Manua's 100 year relationship with the United States. Congressman Faleomavaega said. This celebration is an historic event and I am pleased to be with the people on this important occasion and, again, I am pleased that Chairman Craig recognized the importance of Flag Day and included my written testimony in the Committee records.

I am also pleased to welcome the MV Sili to Manua. It is most fitting for our new vessel to arrive from Louisiana just in time to commemorate Manua's history and to honor our traditional leaders and chiefs, past and present. The arrival of this vessel has been more than a year in the making and I am grateful to our friends in the House and Senate who supported our efforts to set aside funding for this vessel.

When Republicans in the Senate wanted to cut funding for the Territories from the Tax Act of 2003, Democratic Senator Benjamin Nelson from Nebraska fought hard to help us keep our funding in place. Later, Republican Chairman Bill Thomas of the House Ways and Means Committee sent me a letter saying that he was pleased he could assist me in this effort.

Because we were successful in including the Territories, American Samoa received more than \$10 million from the Tax Act of 2003 and I am grateful that Senator John Breaux of Louisiana and Ranking Member Charles Rangel of the House Committee on Ways and Means stood with me in establishing Congressional intent on how these funds should be spent, Congressman Faleomavaega said.

I am also pleased that Governor Togiola stood with me and agreed that \$5 million should be set aside for the purchase of a new vessel for Manua. I am also thankful that Senator Breaux put us in touch with one of the best shipyards in the world located in Louisiana and then personally made sure that American Samoa was receiving one of the best vessels Louisiana had to offer at a cost of \$4 million. I consider Senator Breaux a good friend and I can say with certainty that he is also a friend of American Samoa.

This year, we have much to be thankful for including this historic legislation which is moving through Congress to protect the voting rights of our active duty service members and our college students and other overseas voters. H.R. 2010 is a bipartisan bill which is supported by Republican Chairman Richard Pombo and Ranking Democratic Member Nick Rahall of the House Committee on Resources, Faleomavaega said.

On May 5, 2004, the House Committee on Resources passed this bill by unanimous consent. On June 14, 2004, a Republican controlled House passed H.R. 2010 without objection. I am pleased that the Senate is now