



Senate Fiscal Agency
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BILL ANALYSIS

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Senate Bill 161 (as reported without amendment)
Sponsor: Senator Rebekah Warren
Committee: Transportation

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RATIONALE

Through the years, the State of Michigan has adopted various objects, animals, and plants as official State symbols. In addition to the State flag, State seal, and State coat-of-arms, the symbols include an official State stone (Petoskey), reptile (Painted Turtle), soil (Kalkaska soil series), fossil (mastodon), and others. It now has been suggested that the State adopt an official airplane: the B-24 Liberator. As discussed below, this aircraft was manufactured during World War II at a plant at Michigan's Willow Run airport, where some 42,000 people were employed, and was the most-produced bomber of the war. To commemorate the achievement of those workers and the contribution of the B-24 to winning World War II, and to symbolize Michigan's industrial and engineering achievements and history, it has been suggested that the B-24 Liberator should be the official airplane of the State.

CONTENT

The bill would create a new act to designate the B-24 Liberator as the official State airplane.

BACKGROUND

The B-24 Liberator and the B-17 Flying Fortress were the two principal bombers used by the United States Army Air Force in World War II. The B-24 featured a twin tail and rudder assembly as well as a flat-sided fuselage, earning it the nickname "Flying Boxcar". The plane possessed a wide array of defensive guns mounted in top, nose, tail, and belly turrets, and was capable of carrying 8,000 pounds of bombs. While many flight crews preferred the B-17 because of its ability to withstand more damage, the B-24 had a longer flight range and the ability to carry more munitions, making it the ideal bomber for the Pacific Theater. With a total of 18,188 B-24s built, it was the most-produced bomber of World War II.

The demand was so great that Consolidated (the company that designed the plane) had to license production to North American, Douglas, and Ford. Ford built a plant at Willow Run, in Ypsilanti, Michigan, to build the planes. At 3.5 million square feet, it was the largest factory under a single roof at the time. It also was the workplace of Rose Will Monroe, one of the real-life women on whom "Rosie the Riveter" was based. The factory eventually employed 42,000 people, and by 1944, it was producing one plane every hour. By the end of the war, more than 8,600 B-24s had been built at Willow Run. The production exemplified by Willow Run was the reason southeastern Michigan was dubbed the "Arsenal of Democracy".

ARGUMENTS

(Please note: The arguments contained in this analysis originate from sources outside the Senate Fiscal Agency. The Senate Fiscal Agency neither supports nor opposes legislation.)

Supporting Argument

The B-24 Liberator is a symbol of Michigan's manufacturing skill and industrial ingenuity that still exists today. The assembly-line techniques that Ford applied to manufacturing the aircraft allowed the Willow Run plant to build one every 55 minutes at its peak. Moreover, a current plan to convert the Willow Run plant into one of the largest autonomous vehicle testing facilities emphasizes the creativity of Michigan industry, tying this plane and its story to the present and future. Designating the B-24 as the State airplane would highlight Michigan, symbolize a momentous time and Michigan's contribution to the war effort, and honor those who participated in World War II.

In addition, the bill could help raise awareness and money for a proposed museum at Willow Run, which would attempt to purchase one of the four remaining bombers made there for display.

Response: While the B-24 Liberator is undoubtedly an important airplane that played a significant role in Michigan's history, the Ford Tri-Motor would be more suitable for designation as the State airplane. Specifically, the Tri-Motor better symbolizes Michigan's contributions to aviation history and is more Michigan-centric, having been built exclusively in this State. The B-24 Liberator, on the other hand, also was built in Dallas, Texas; Fort Worth, Texas; Tulsa, Oklahoma; and San Diego, California. The Liberator was a product of war that happened to see significant production within the State and broad, successful use during World War II. In contrast, the Tri-Motor was used in both civilian and military capacity. According to Committee testimony, the Tri-Motor was the first plane to be widely used for commercial passenger transportation. Reportedly, Charles Lindberg flew the first commercial passenger transcontinental flight using a Tri-Motor. According to the Smithsonian Institution, the Tri-Motor played a major role in convincing the public of the safety and practicality of air travel.¹ More than 100 airlines flew the plane in the United States, Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, Europe, Australia, and China. The plane was viewed as rugged yet well-constructed, and its ability to operate from grass and dirt airstrips have kept it in operation today. The B-24 Liberator surely represents an important time in Michigan history and adequately symbolizes Michigan's industrial history and culture, but the Ford Tri-Motor would be a more appropriate designation.

Legislative Analyst: Drew Krogulecki

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill would have no fiscal impact on State or local government.

Fiscal Analyst: Joe Carrasco

¹ "Ford 5-AT Tri-Motor", Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum.

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This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.