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June 2, 2016

Great Floridians Program Ad Hoc Committee
Division of Historical Resources
ATTN: National Statuary Hall
3rd Floor, R.A. Gray Building
500 South Bronough Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0250

RE: Recommend Great Floridian Mary McLeod Bethune for U.S. Capitol National Statuary Hall

Dear Great Floridians Program Ad Hoc Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to recommend an outstanding Floridian to represent our great state in the U.S. Capitol's National Statuary Hall in Washington, D.C. I recommend the great educator and visionary, Mary McLeod Bethune.

Mary McLeod Bethune was a world-renowned educator, civil rights leader, supporter of American military service members, and the first African American to be appointed to a federal position by *any* President of the United States. Bethune recognized the importance of education and political and economic empowerment for all, especially African Americans and women. She founded the Daytona Normal and Industrial Institute for Negro Girls in Daytona, Florida in 1904 with only five students. The school grew and later merged with the Cookman Institute for Men. The co-educational school was renamed the Bethune-Cookman College and became a fully accredited university in 1943, a university that continues to educate the brightest minds in Florida and prepare students for success. Bethune served as president of the university until 1942 and from 1946-47. She continued to contribute to our great state as President of the Florida chapter of the National Association of Colored Women and as President of the Florida State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs.

Born the 15th of 17 children to former slaves, Mary McLeod Bethune grew up in poverty and worked in the cotton fields. She walked miles every day to attend missionary school and receive her education. She received a scholarship to Scotia Seminary and later studied at the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. Her commitment to education is unparalleled. A tribute to her would demonstrate Florida's idealism and commitment to education for all – a wonderful symbol for the U.S. Capitol and the many children and families who visit.

Bethune's dedication to service on the national level sets her apart from many other worthy Floridians as she worked with *four* U.S. presidents, Republican and Democratic.

President Coolidge appointed her to the National Child Welfare Commission. She continued to serve on this commission under President Hoover and was appointed to the Commission on Home Building and Home Ownership and to a committee on child health. Mary McLeod Bethune was a friend and advisor to President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his wife Eleanor. She was a member of FDR's "Black Cabinet" that advised the President on challenges facing African Americans and policies for social change. Bethune was the first black woman to occupy such a high-level federal position. She also was appointed Director of the Division of Negro Affairs of the National Youth Administration. President Truman appointed Bethune to a national defense committee and as the Official Delegate to the second inauguration of William V.S. Tubman as President of Liberia.

Mary McLeod Bethune also made significant contributions to the military and humanitarian causes. In World War I, Bethune worked to integrate the Red Cross. In World War II, she served as special assistant to the Secretary of War and Assistant Director of the Women's Army Corps. She strove for equality and pressed for officials to commission black women as officers.

Perhaps Bethune's greatest contributions to the United States are reflected in her tireless civil rights activism. In 1935, Bethune founded the National Council of Negro Women to represent the concerns of African American women and give them the opportunity to realize their goals for social justice and civil rights. She was a prominent member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and served as Vice-President and Consultant to the conference to draft the United Nations Charter in 1945.

"If I have a legacy to leave my people, it is my philosophy of living and serving," Bethune wrote in her Last Will and Testament. Mary McLeod Bethune's uncompromising commitment to serving Florida and her country, through education, civil rights, our military, public service, and beyond, is an extraordinary legacy that must be captured and shared with future generations. All Floridians would be proud to be represented by such an incredible woman in our nation's Capitol, a leader who dedicated her life to serving others.

You have a difficult job ahead, indeed. There are many deserving and outstanding Floridians to choose from. I encourage you to consider the great diversity of the Sunshine State and reflect a more inclusive legacy. Females are highly unrepresented in the U.S. Capitol. *Of the one hundred statues in the National Statuary Hall collection, there are only nine female statues on display.* We can do better and the great State of Florida should lead the way! There are countless female Floridians who would be excellent candidates, including Marjorie Stoneman Douglas, Ruth Bryan Owen, and Zora Neale Hurston. However, I can think of no better candidate than Mary McLeod Bethune.

Sincerely,



Kathy Castor
United States Representative
Florida - District 14