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Mister Speaker, this Black History month I rise to celebrate the life of a local trail blazer, author and historian, Ms. Gloria Jean Royster.

Ms. Royster is a resident of north downtown Tampa where she regularly advocates for safer pedestrian access and infrastructure, and quality-of-life issues for residents living in her River Arts District neighborhood. In late 2022, she contributed to the story and history of Ashley Drive and the surrounding area for the City of Tampa's application for the Reconnecting Communities Grant Pilot Program/Ashley Drive Redesign Project. When the city was awarded the grant it shared credit with Ms. Royster for helping to tell Tampa's story as part of the application. Ms. Royster shared this significant achievement with some of the historic residents who were impacted by demolished communities and with her River Arts District community leaders. This project will include removal of an interstate ramp and open streets which fulfills a dream of Ms. Royster and her neighbors for direct pedestrian access to The Tampa Riverwalk.

She retired to Tampa to be a full-time tourist and ended up volunteering in her community. An avid Tampa history buff and researcher, Ms. Royster currently spends her time telling the story of Tampa through her signature Tampa History Postcards, which include many historical nuggets of Tampa's Black community. Ms. Royster helped erect the Madame Fortune Taylor Bridge Historical Marker (2018) in downtown Tampa and she is the creator of the Tampa Bay History Center Madame Fortune Taylor Walking Tour, which she led for three years and received a "Best of the Bay 2021" nomination for Best Walking Tour. Madame Fortune was born into slavery and after gaining her freedom, became a Tampa businesswoman who owned more than 30 acres of land in the late 1880s but sold it as part of an agreement that a bridge be built over the river which would connect East and West Tampa. The historic bridge was built in 1892 and named after Taylor.

Ms. Royster is a native of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, but life has taken her many places, and she considers Chicago, Illinois home where she raised her only child Ike Murray, Jr. (ret. USAF), and where four of her seven siblings live. Ms. Royster has a passion for her two strengths, caring for others or writing about them. After high school she taught and cared for 2-year-olds at a pre-school in Raleigh, NC before entering the hospitality industry. While in college she was hired as a Feature Writer for *Muhammad Speaks* Newspaper in Chicago (later Bilalian News and The American

Muslim Journal). While observing her story subjects she caught the hospitality bug again and left journalism for several years.

When she lived in Atlanta, Ms. Royster worked as a community grassroots organizer and was nicknamed the “The Quiet Riot.” It was at this time she was encouraged by her mother, Ms. Doris L. Muhammad Royster to write children’s books. Ms. Royster wrote her first children’s book manuscript while spending time with her young nephew. He was a window to her destiny. She wrote her second children’s book manuscript “*GO! In The Snow*” and self-published in 2019. Her third children’s book manuscript, “*Al Li Gator and J. Louis Bat*”, which takes place at the Bat House in Tampa near the Historic Fortune Taylor Bridge will be released this spring and we will see other book projects in the future.

Mister Speaker, on behalf of the entire Tampa Bay community, I am honored to recognize Ms. Gloria Jean Royster for her outstanding contributions to keep our local Black history alive and using it to create positive change in the future as well as her selfless acts of community service in uplifting her neighbors.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy Castor". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kathy Castor
United States Representative
Florida – District 14