

115TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 2989

AN ACT

To establish the Frederick Douglass Bicentennial
Commission

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

1 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

2 This Act may be cited as the “Frederick Douglass
3 Bicentennial Commission Act”.

4 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

5 Congress makes the following findings:

6 (1) Born into slavery on the Eastern Shore of
7 Maryland in 1818 and given the name Frederick
8 Augustus Washington Bailey after his mother Har-
9 riet Bailey, Frederick Douglass has been called the
10 father of the civil rights movement.

11 (2) Douglass rose through determination, bril-
12 liance, and eloquence to shape the American Nation.
13 He was an abolitionist, human rights and women’s
14 rights activist, orator, author, journalist, publisher,
15 and social reformer.

16 (3) Taught basic reading skills by his mistress
17 until she was forced to stop, Douglass continued to
18 teach himself to read and write and taught other
19 slaves to read despite risks including death.

20 (4) During the course of his remarkable life
21 Frederick Douglass escaped from slavery, became
22 internationally renowned for his eloquence in the
23 cause of liberty, and went on to serve the national
24 government in several official capacities.

25 (5) Forced to leave the country to avoid arrest
26 as an escaped slave, he returned to become a

1 staunch advocate of the Union cause and helped re-
2 cruit African-American troops for the Union Army,
3 including two of his sons, Charles and Lewis Doug-
4 lass. His personal relationship with Abraham Lin-
5 coln helped persuade the President to make emanci-
6 pation a cause of the Civil War.

7 (6) With the abolition of slavery at the close of
8 the Civil War, Douglass then turned his attention to
9 the full integration of African-Americans into the
10 political and economic life of the United States.
11 Committed to freedom, Douglass dedicated his life
12 to achieving justice for all Americans, in particular
13 African-Americans, women, and minority groups. He
14 envisioned America as an inclusive Nation strength-
15 ened by diversity and free of discrimination.

16 (7) Douglass served as an advisor to Presi-
17 dents. Abraham Lincoln referred to him as the most
18 meritorious man of the nineteenth century. Douglass
19 was appointed to several offices. He served as the
20 United States Marshal of the District of Columbia
21 under Rutherford B. Hayes' administration; Presi-
22 dent James Garfield appointed Douglass the District
23 of Columbia Recorder of Deeds. In 1889, President
24 Benjamin Harrison appointed Frederick Douglass to
25 be the United States minister to Haiti. He was also

1 appointed by President Grant to serve as Assistant
2 Secretary of the Commission of Inquiry to Santo
3 Domingo.

4 (8) Douglass lived in the District of Columbia
5 for 23 of his 57 years as a free man, and in recogni-
6 tion of his leadership and continuous fight for jus-
7 tice and freedom, his home, Cedar Hill, was estab-
8 lished as a National Historic Site in Anacostia, in
9 Southeast Washington, DC.

10 (9) The statue of Frederick Douglass in the
11 United States Capitol is a gift from the almost
12 700,000 residents of the District of Columbia.

13 (10) All Americans could benefit from studying
14 the life of Frederick Douglass, for Douglass dedi-
15 cated his own life to ensuring freedom and equality
16 for future generations of Americans. This Nation
17 should ensure that his tireless struggle, trans-
18 formative words, and inclusive vision of humanity
19 continue to inspire and sustain us.

20 (11) The year 2018 marks the bicentennial an-
21 niversary of the birth of Frederick Douglass, and a
22 commission should be established to plan, develop,
23 and carry out, and to recommend to Congress, pro-
24 grams and activities that are fitting and proper to

1 celebrate that anniversary in a manner that appro-
2 priately honors Frederick Douglass.

3 **SEC. 3. ESTABLISHMENT.**

4 There is established a commission to be known as the
5 Frederick Douglass Bicentennial Commission (referred to
6 in this Act as the “Commission”).

7 **SEC. 4. DUTIES.**

8 The Commission shall have the following duties:

9 (1) To plan, develop, and carry out programs
10 and activities that are fitting and proper to honor
11 Frederick Douglass on the occasion of the bicenten-
12 nial anniversary of Douglass’ birth.

13 (2) To recommend to Congress programs and
14 activities that the Commission considers fitting and
15 proper to honor Frederick Douglass on such occa-
16 sion, and the entity or entities in the Federal Gov-
17 ernment that the Commission considers most appro-
18 priate to carry out such programs and activities.

19 **SEC. 5. MEMBERSHIP.**

20 (a) NUMBER AND APPOINTMENT.—The Commission
21 shall be composed of 16 members appointed as follows:

22 (1) Two members, each of whom shall be a
23 qualified citizen described in subsection (b), ap-
24 pointed by the President.

1 (2) One member, who shall be a qualified cit-
2 izen described in subsection (b), appointed by the
3 President on the recommendation of the Governor of
4 Maryland.

5 (3) One member, who shall be a qualified cit-
6 izen described in subsection (b), appointed by the
7 President on the recommendation of the Governor of
8 Massachusetts.

9 (4) One member, who shall be a qualified cit-
10 izen described in subsection (b), appointed by the
11 President on the recommendation of the Governor of
12 New York.

13 (5) One member, who shall be a qualified cit-
14 izen described in subsection (b), appointed by the
15 President on the recommendation of the Mayor of
16 the District of Columbia.

17 (6) Three members, at least one of whom shall
18 be a Member of the House of Representatives, ap-
19 pointed by the Speaker of the House of Representa-
20 tives.

21 (7) Three members, at least one of whom shall
22 be a Senator, appointed by the majority leader of
23 the Senate.

24 (8) Two members, at least one of whom shall
25 be a Member of the House of Representatives, ap-

1 pointed by the minority leader of the House of Rep-
2 resentatives.

3 (9) Two members, at least one of whom shall
4 be a Senator, appointed by the minority leader of
5 the Senate.

6 (b) QUALIFIED CITIZEN.—A qualified citizen de-
7 scribed in this subsection is a private citizen of the United
8 States with—

9 (1) a demonstrated dedication to educating oth-
10 ers about the importance of historical figures and
11 events; and

12 (2) substantial knowledge and appreciation of
13 Frederick Douglass.

14 (c) TIME OF APPOINTMENT.—Each initial appoint-
15 ment of a member of the Commission shall be made before
16 the expiration of the 60-day period beginning on the date
17 of the enactment of this Act.

18 (d) CONTINUATION OF MEMBERSHIP.—If a member
19 of the Commission was appointed to the Commission as
20 a Member of Congress, and ceases to be a Member of Con-
21 gress, that member may continue to serve on the Commis-
22 sion for not longer than the 30-day period beginning on
23 the date that member ceases to be a Member of Congress.

24 (e) TERMS.—Each member shall be appointed for the
25 life of the Commission.

1 (f) VACANCIES.—A vacancy in the Commission shall
2 not affect the powers of the Commission but shall be filled
3 in the manner in which the original appointment was
4 made.

5 (g) BASIC PAY.—Members shall serve on the Com-
6 mission without pay.

7 (h) TRAVEL EXPENSES.—Each member shall receive
8 travel expenses, including per diem in lieu of subsistence,
9 in accordance with sections 5702 and 5703 of title 5,
10 United States Code.

11 (i) QUORUM.—Six members of the Commission shall
12 constitute a quorum but a lesser number may hold hear-
13 ings.

14 (j) CHAIR.—The Commission shall select a Chair
15 from among the members of the Commission.

16 (k) MEETINGS.—The Commission shall meet at the
17 call of the Chair. Periodically, the Commission shall hold
18 a meeting in Rochester, New York.

19 **SEC. 6. DIRECTOR AND STAFF.**

20 (a) DIRECTOR.—The Commission may appoint and
21 fix the pay of a Director and such additional personnel
22 as the Commission considers to be appropriate.

23 (b) APPLICABILITY OF CERTAIN CIVIL SERVICE
24 LAWS.—

1 (1) DIRECTOR.—The Director of the Commis-
2 sion may be appointed without regard to the provi-
3 sions of title 5, United States Code, governing ap-
4 pointments in the competitive service, and may be
5 paid without regard to the provisions of chapter 51
6 and subchapter III of chapter 53 of that title relat-
7 ing to classification and General Schedule pay rates.

8 (2) STAFF.—The staff of the Commission shall
9 be appointed subject to the provisions of title 5,
10 United States Code, governing appointments in the
11 competitive service, and shall be paid in accordance
12 with the provisions of chapter 51 and subchapter III
13 of chapter 53 of that title relating to classification
14 and General Schedule pay rates.

15 **SEC. 7. POWERS.**

16 (a) HEARINGS AND SESSIONS.—The Commission
17 may, for the purpose of carrying out this Act, hold such
18 hearings, sit and act at such times and places, take such
19 testimony, and receive such evidence as the Commission
20 considers to be appropriate.

21 (b) POWERS OF MEMBERS AND AGENTS.—Any mem-
22 ber or agent of the Commission may, if authorized by the
23 Commission, take any action that the Commission is au-
24 thorized to take by this Act.

1 (c) OBTAINING OFFICIAL DATA.—The Commission
2 may secure directly from any department or agency of the
3 United States information necessary to enable the Com-
4 mission to carry out this Act. Upon request of the Chair
5 of the Commission, the head of that department or agency
6 shall furnish that information to the Commission.

7 (d) MAILS.—The Commission may use the United
8 States mails in the same manner and under the same con-
9 ditions as other departments and agencies of the United
10 States.

11 (e) ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT SERVICES.—Upon
12 the request of the Commission, the Administrator of Gen-
13 eral Services shall provide to the Commission, on a reim-
14 bursable basis, the administrative support services nec-
15 essary for the Commission to carry out its responsibilities
16 under this Act.

17 (f) GIFTS.—The Commission may solicit, accept, use,
18 and dispose of gifts, bequests, or devises of money or other
19 property for the purpose of carrying out its duties.

20 (g) VOLUNTEER AND UNCOMPENSATED SERVICES.—
21 Notwithstanding section 1342 of title 31, United States
22 Code, the Commission may accept and use voluntary and
23 uncompensated services as the Commission determines
24 necessary.

1 **SEC. 8. REPORTS.**

2 (a) INITIAL REPORT.—Not later than August 1,
3 2018, the Commission shall submit to Congress an initial
4 report containing its recommendations under section 4(2).

5 (b) FINAL REPORT.—Not later than June 1, 2019,
6 the Commission shall submit a final report to Congress,
7 and shall include in the final report—

8 (1) a summary of its activities and programs;

9 (2) a final accounting of the funds the Commis-
10 sion received and expended; and

11 (3) any other information that the Commission
12 considers to be appropriate.

13 **SEC. 9. TERMINATION.**

14 The Commission shall terminate 30 days after sub-
15 mitting the final report pursuant to section 8(b).

16 **SEC. 10. NO ADDITIONAL FUNDS AUTHORIZED.**

17 No Federal funds are authorized or may be obligated
18 to carry out this Act.

Passed the House of Representatives October 11,
2017.

Attest:

Clerk.

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