

114TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 671

To award a Congressional Gold Medal to the Freedom Riders, collectively, in recognition of their unique contribution to Civil Rights, which inspired a revolutionary movement for equality in interstate travel.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 3, 2015

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia (for himself, Mr. COLLINS of Georgia, Ms. HAHN, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, Mr. NADLER, Mr. YARMUTH, Mr. CARSON of Indiana, Mr. SCHIFF, Mr. LYNCH, Ms. NORTON, Mr. KILMER, Mr. ISRAEL, Mr. MURPHY of Florida, Mr. LIPINSKI, Ms. BROWN of Florida, Mr. CROWLEY, Mr. BISHOP of Georgia, Mr. MICHAEL F. DOYLE of Pennsylvania, Mr. COHEN, Ms. EDWARDS, Ms. BROWNLEY of California, Mr. CLYBURN, Mr. FRANKS of Arizona, Mr. PIERLUISI, Mr. CUMMINGS, Ms. PINGREE, Mr. LEVIN, Mr. MEEKS, Ms. SLAUGHTER, Ms. JACKSON LEE, Mr. CICILLINE, Ms. CLARK of Massachusetts, Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN, Mr. TONKO, Mr. PETERS, Mr. CLAY, Ms. WILSON of Florida, Mr. CAPUANO, Mrs. BEATTY, Ms. JENKINS of Kansas, Mr. RANGEL, Mr. DEFazio, Mr. ELLISON, Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi, Mr. DAVID SCOTT of Georgia, Ms. SPEIER, Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, Mr. JEFFRIES, Ms. KAPTUR, Mr. LANGEVIN, Mr. CONYERS, Mr. CONNOLLY, Mr. AL GREEN of Texas, Mr. WALZ, Mr. LARSON of Connecticut, Ms. LEE, Mr. NUNNELEE, Ms. CHU of California, Mr. GRIJALVA, Mr. SMITH of Washington, Mr. DANNY K. DAVIS of Illinois, Mrs. KIRKPATRICK, Ms. ROYBAL-ALLARD, Mr. HINOJOSA, Mr. DOGGETT, Mr. McDERMOTT, Ms. MCCOLLUM, Ms. MAXINE WATERS of California, Mr. BUTTERFIELD, Mr. GENE GREEN of Texas, Mr. SARBANES, Mr. SCHOCK, Mr. VARGAS, Mr. DEUTCH, Mrs. BUSTOS, Mr. O'ROURKE, Mr. BEYER, Ms. FUDGE, Mr. HIGGINS, Mr. HASTINGS, Mr. LOWENTHAL, Mr. THOMPSON of California, Ms. KUSTER, Ms. CASTOR of Florida, Mr. PITTS, Ms. CLARKE of New York, Mr. BLUMENAUER, Mrs. CAROLYN B. MALONEY of New York, Mr. BRADY of Pennsylvania, Ms. LORETTA SANCHEZ of California, Ms. DELBENE, Mr. POCAN, Ms. SEWELL of Alabama, Mr. SWALWELL of California, Mr. SCOTT of Virginia, Mr. RICHMOND, Mr. FATTAH, Ms. TITUS, Mr. VEASEY, Mr. CÁRDENAS, Mr. PRICE of North Carolina, Mr. RODNEY DAVIS of Illinois, Ms. DEGETTE, Ms. ESHOO, Mr. CLEAVER, Mr. RUSH, Mr. MCGOVERN, Ms. ESTY, Mr. GARAMENDI, Mr. ROHRBACHER, Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas, Mr. RUPPERSBERGER, Miss RICE of New York, Mr. LIEU of California, Mr. SIRES, Mr. PASCRELL, Ms.

BORDALLO, Mr. RIGELL, Mr. QUIGLEY, Ms. KELLY of Illinois, Mr. BEN RAY LUJÁN of New Mexico, Ms. ADAMS, Mr. GUTIÉRREZ, Ms. MOORE, Mr. SEAN PATRICK MALONEY of New York, Mrs. LAWRENCE, Ms. BASS, Mr. FARR, Mr. BERA, Mr. SHERMAN, Mrs. LOVE, Ms. SCHAKOWSKY, Mr. PAYNE, Mr. HONDA, Mr. BROOKS of Alabama, Ms. PLASKETT, and Mr. MCNERNEY) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Financial Services, and in addition to the Committee on House Administration, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

A BILL

To award a Congressional Gold Medal to the Freedom Riders, collectively, in recognition of their unique contribution to Civil Rights, which inspired a revolutionary movement for equality in interstate travel.

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

3 **SECTION 1. FINDINGS.**

4 The Congress finds the following:

5 (1) In 1960, the Supreme Court ruled in *Boyn-*
 6 *ton v. Virginia* that segregated bus and rail stations
 7 were unconstitutional.

8 (2) The rigid system of racial segregation that
 9 prevailed in the United States during the 1960s did
 10 not permit a Black person to sit next to a White
 11 person on any bus traveling through interstate com-
 12 merce and in most locations in the South. Bus sta-
 13 tions had “Whites Only” waiting areas and Blacks

1 were not permitted to wait in those areas despite the
2 Supreme Court making it the law of the land.

3 (3) The Freedom Riders, with the intent to end
4 segregation in public transportation throughout the
5 South, paved the way for full racial integration of
6 the United States transit system. They overcame
7 prejudice, discrimination, and violence. They sparked
8 a movement that changed our Nation.

9 (4) The Congress of Racial Equality (C.O.R.E.)
10 selected thirteen volunteers for nonviolent response
11 training to join in the Freedom Rides from Wash-
12 ington, DC, to New Orleans, LA. The Freedom Rid-
13 ers used their strategies of nonviolence throughout
14 the South to challenge the region's Jim Crow laws
15 directly and enforce the Supreme Court decision in
16 Boynton.

17 (5) On the morning of May 4, 1961, the Free-
18 dom Riders, comprised of seven Blacks and six
19 Whites, boarded two buses, with Blacks and Whites
20 seated together. Those thirteen Freedom Riders
21 were: Genevieve Hughes Houghton, Charles Person,
22 Hank Thomas, John Lewis, Edward Blankenheim,
23 James Farmer, Walter Bergman, Frances Bergman,
24 Joseph Perkins, Jimmy McDonald, Mae Francis
25 Moultrie, Benjamin Elton Cox, and Albert Bigelow.

1 Most segregated States considered even this level of
2 integration a crime. At various stops along the way,
3 the Freedom Riders would enter areas designated
4 “Whites” and “Colored” and would eat together at
5 segregated lunch counters to defy local laws.

6 (6) Initially, the Freedom Riders had encoun-
7 tered only minor clashes until a stop in South Caro-
8 lina. In Rock Hill, an angry mob severely beat John
9 Lewis, now a Congressman from the 5th District of
10 Georgia, when he entered the bus station. Henry
11 “Hank” Thomas was jailed when he entered the bus
12 station in Winnsboro. Authorities delivered him to a
13 waiting mob long after the station had closed that
14 evening. A local Black minister rescued Thomas, en-
15 abling him to rejoin the group in Columbia. How-
16 ever, Lewis was so badly beaten he could not con-
17 tinue the Freedom Rides.

18 (7) Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and other civil
19 rights leaders met with the group in Atlanta to dis-
20 suade their continuance through the Deep South due
21 to death threats. Despite these warnings, more Free-
22 dom Riders joined in Atlanta. Dedicated to their
23 mission to end segregation in the South and trained
24 in nonviolent movements, the Freedom Riders con-
25 tinued on their journey.

1 (8) On Mother’s Day, May 14, 1961, the Free-
2 dom Riders were on two different buses. An angry
3 mob in Anniston, Alabama, firebombed the first bus.
4 When the Freedom Riders rushed out, still choking
5 from the thick smoke of the burning bus, the wait-
6 ing angry mob beat them with lead pipes and base-
7 ball bats as the bus exploded. Ambulances refused to
8 transport the Black Freedom Riders to the hospital.
9 The mob beat the Freedom Riders on the second bus
10 and forced them to sit in the back. As they jour-
11 neyed to Birmingham, another mob savagely beat
12 the Freedom Riders.

13 (9) The Nashville (TN) Student Group, a local
14 group of students who had been successful in deseg-
15 regating the lunch counters and movie theaters in
16 Nashville (TN), vowed not to let these acts of vio-
17 lence curtail the goal of the Freedom Rides. They
18 sent their members to continue the Freedom Rides
19 and called out to other student groups to do the
20 same.

21 (10) As the violence grew, the Attorney General
22 of the United States called in the National Guard
23 and the U.S. Marshals to protect the Freedom Rid-
24 ers as they journeyed through Alabama. This protec-
25 tion was short-lived. The Federal authorities turned

1 the Freedom Riders over to the local authorities in
2 Mississippi who then arrested the Freedom Riders
3 for disturbing the peace.

4 (11) The government of Mississippi imprisoned
5 many of the Freedom Riders in Parchman Prison
6 known for its horrific conditions, such as subjecting
7 the Freedom Riders to strip searches, work on chain
8 gangs, and light shining in their cells 24 hours a
9 day. Despite these conditions, the Freedom Riders
10 refused bail because they were determined to spread
11 the message of their nonviolent movement.

12 (12) Five months after the first Freedom Rides
13 left on their historic ride, the Interstate Commerce
14 Commission in conjunction with the U.S. Attorney
15 General Robert Kennedy issued a Federal order ban-
16 ning segregation at all interstate public facilities
17 based upon “race, color or creed”. The law became
18 effective on November 1, 1961.

19 (13) In 2011, the President of the United
20 States paid tribute to the Freedom Riders with a
21 Presidential proclamation honoring the 50th anni-
22 versary of the first Freedom Ride by brave Ameri-
23 cans whose selfless act of courage helped pave the
24 way for others to continue on the road to Civil
25 Rights in America.

1 **SEC. 2. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL.**

2 (a) PRESENTATION AUTHORIZATION.—The Speaker
3 of the House of Representatives and the President pro
4 tempore of the Senate shall make appropriate arrange-
5 ments for the presentation, on behalf of the Congress, of
6 a gold medal of appropriate design to the Freedom Riders,
7 collectively, in recognition of their unique contribution to
8 Civil Rights, which inspired a revolutionary movement to
9 equality in interstate travel.

10 (b) DESIGN AND STRIKING.—For the purposes of the
11 award referred to in subsection (a), the Secretary of the
12 Treasury (hereafter in this Act referred to as the “Sec-
13 retary”) shall strike a gold medal with suitable emblems,
14 devices, and inscriptions, to be determined by the Sec-
15 retary.

16 (c) SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.—

17 (1) IN GENERAL.—Following the award of the
18 gold medal under subsection (a), the gold medal
19 shall be given to the Smithsonian Institution, where
20 it will be available for display as appropriate and
21 available for research.

22 (2) SENSE OF THE CONGRESS.—It is the sense
23 of the Congress that the Smithsonian Institution
24 should make the gold medal awarded pursuant to
25 this Act available for display elsewhere, particularly

1 at appropriate locations associated with the Freedom
2 Riders.

3 **SEC. 3. DUPLICATE MEDALS.**

4 The Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in
5 bronze of the gold medal struck pursuant to section 2
6 under such regulations as the Secretary may prescribe, at
7 a price sufficient to cover the cost thereof, including labor,
8 materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses,
9 and the cost of the gold medal.

10 **SEC. 4. NATIONAL MEDALS.**

11 Medals struck pursuant to this Act are national med-
12 als for the purposes of chapter 51 of title 31, United
13 States Code.

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