

116TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 8856

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

DECEMBER 3, 2020

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia (for himself, Ms. ADAMS, Mrs. BEATTY, Mr. BERA, Mr. BISHOP of Georgia, Mrs. BUSTOS, Mr. BUTTERFIELD, Ms. CASTOR of Florida, Ms. CLARKE of New York, Mr. COOPER, Mr. DESAULNIER, Mr. MICHAEL F. DOYLE of Pennsylvania, Ms. ESHOO, Ms. FUDGE, Ms. GABBARD, Mr. GARAMENDI, Mr. GREEN of Texas, Mr. GRIJALVA, Ms. HAALAND, Mr. HASTINGS, Ms. JACKSON LEE, Mr. KILMER, Ms. KUSTER of New Hampshire, Mr. LANGEVIN, Mrs. LAWRENCE, Ms. LEE of California, Mr. LOWENTHAL, Mrs. CAROLYN B. MALONEY of New York, Mr. SEAN PATRICK MALONEY of New York, Ms. MOORE, Mr. NADLER, Ms. NORTON, Mr. PETERS, Mr. POCAN, Mr. SARBANES, Ms. SCHAKOWSKY, Ms. SPEIER, Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi, Ms. TITUS, Mr. VARGAS, Mr. YARMUTH, Mr. BEYER, and Mr. LYNCH) 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
14 were not permitted to wait in those areas despite the
15 Supreme Court making it the law of the land.

16 (3) The Freedom Riders, with the intent to end
17 segregation in public transportation throughout the
18 South, paved the way for full racial integration of
19 the United States transit system. They overcame
20 prejudice, discrimination, and violence. They sparked
21 a movement that changed our Nation.

22 (4) The Congress of Racial Equality (C.O.R.E.)
23 selected thirteen volunteers for nonviolent response
24 training to join in the Freedom Rides from Wash-
25 ington, DC, to New Orleans, LA. The Freedom Rid-

1 ers used their strategies of nonviolence throughout
2 the South to challenge the region’s Jim Crow laws
3 directly and enforce the Supreme Court decision in
4 Boynton.

5 (5) On the morning of May 4, 1961, the Free-
6 dom Riders, comprised of seven Blacks and six
7 Whites, boarded two buses, with Blacks and Whites
8 seated together. Those thirteen Freedom Riders
9 were: Genevieve Hughes Houghton, Charles Person,
10 Hank Thomas, John Lewis, Edward Blankenheim,
11 James Farmer, Walter Bergman, Frances Bergman,
12 Joseph Perkins, Jimmy McDonald, Mae Francis
13 Moultrie, Benjamin Elton Cox, and Albert Bigelow.
14 Most segregated States considered even this level of
15 integration a crime. At various stops along the way,
16 the Freedom Riders would enter areas designated
17 “Whites” and “Colored” and would eat together at
18 segregated lunch counters to defy local laws.

19 (6) Initially, the Freedom Riders had encoun-
20 tered only minor clashes until a stop in South Caro-
21 lina. In Rock Hill, an angry mob severely beat John
22 Lewis, late Congressman from the 5th District of
23 Georgia, when he entered the bus station. Henry
24 “Hank” Thomas was jailed when he entered the bus
25 station in Winnsboro. Authorities delivered him to a

1 waiting mob long after the station had closed that
2 evening. A local Black minister rescued Thomas, en-
3 abling him to rejoin the group in Columbia. How-
4 ever, Lewis was so badly beaten he could not con-
5 tinue the Freedom Rides.

6 (7) Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and other civil
7 rights leaders met with the group in Atlanta to dis-
8 suade their continuance through the Deep South due
9 to death threats. Despite these warnings, more Free-
10 dom Riders joined in Atlanta. Dedicated to their
11 mission to end segregation in the South and trained
12 in nonviolent movements, the Freedom Riders con-
13 tinued on their journey.

14 (8) On Mother's Day, May 14, 1961, the Free-
15 dom Riders were on two different buses. An angry
16 mob in Anniston, Alabama, firebombed the first bus.
17 When the Freedom Riders rushed out, still choking
18 from the thick smoke of the burning bus, the wait-
19 ing angry mob beat them with lead pipes and base-
20 ball bats as the bus exploded. Ambulances refused to
21 transport the Black Freedom Riders to the hospital.
22 The mob beat the Freedom Riders on the second bus
23 and forced them to sit in the back. As they jour-
24 neyed to Birmingham, another mob savagely beat
25 the Freedom Riders.

1 (9) The Nashville (TN) Student Group, a local
2 group of students who had been successful in deseg-
3 regating the lunch counters and movie theaters in
4 Nashville (TN), vowed not to let these acts of vio-
5 lence curtail the goal of the Freedom Rides. They
6 sent their members to continue the Freedom Rides
7 and called out to other student groups to do the
8 same.

9 (10) As the violence grew, the Attorney General
10 of the United States called in the National Guard
11 and the U.S. Marshals to protect the Freedom Rid-
12 ers as they journeyed through Alabama. This protec-
13 tion was short-lived. The Federal authorities turned
14 the Freedom Riders over to the local authorities in
15 Mississippi who then arrested the Freedom Riders
16 for disturbing the peace.

17 (11) The government of Mississippi imprisoned
18 many of the Freedom Riders in Parchman Prison
19 known for its horrific conditions, such as subjecting
20 the Freedom Riders to strip searches, work on chain
21 gangs, and light shining in their cells 24 hours a
22 day. Despite these conditions, the Freedom Riders
23 refused bail because they were determined to spread
24 the message of their nonviolent movement.

1 (12) Five months after the first Freedom Rid-
2 ers left on their historic ride, the Interstate Com-
3 merce Commission in conjunction with the U.S. At-
4 torney General Robert Kennedy issued a Federal
5 order banning segregation at all interstate public fa-
6 cilities based upon “race, color or creed”. The law
7 became effective on November 1, 1961.

8 (13) In 2011, Barack Obama, the President of
9 the United States paid tribute to the Freedom Rid-
10 ers with a Presidential proclamation honoring the
11 50th anniversary of the first Freedom Ride by brave
12 Americans whose selfless act of courage helped pave
13 the way for others to continue on the road to Civil
14 Rights in America.

15 **SEC. 2. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL.**

16 (a) PRESENTATION AUTHORIZATION.—The Speaker
17 of the House of Representatives and the President pro
18 tempore of the Senate shall make appropriate arrange-
19 ments for the presentation, on behalf of the Congress, of
20 a gold medal of appropriate design to the Freedom Riders,
21 collectively, in recognition of their unique contribution to
22 Civil Rights, which inspired a revolutionary movement to
23 equality in interstate travel.

24 (b) DESIGN AND STRIKING.—For the purposes of the
25 award referred to in subsection (a), the Secretary of the

1 Treasury (hereafter in this Act referred to as the “Sec-
2 retary”) shall strike a gold medal with suitable emblems,
3 devices, and inscriptions, to be determined by the Sec-
4 retary.

5 (c) SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.—

6 (1) IN GENERAL.—Following the award of the
7 gold medal under subsection (a), the gold medal
8 shall be given to the Smithsonian Institution, where
9 it will be available for display as appropriate and
10 available for research.

11 (2) SENSE OF THE CONGRESS.—It is the sense
12 of the Congress that the Smithsonian Institution
13 should make the gold medal awarded pursuant to
14 this Act available for display elsewhere, particularly
15 at appropriate locations associated with the Freedom
16 Riders.

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

18 The Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in
19 bronze of the gold medal struck pursuant to section 2
20 under such regulations as the Secretary may prescribe, at
21 a price sufficient to cover the cost thereof, including labor,
22 materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses,
23 and the cost of the gold medal.

1 **SEC. 4. NATIONAL MEDALS.**

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

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