

118TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# H. R. 1247

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.

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## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 28, 2023

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia (for himself, Ms. MACE, Ms. MOORE of Wisconsin, Mrs. BEATTY, Mr. COHEN, Ms. BONAMICI, Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi, Mrs. TORRES of California, Mr. TRONE, Mr. DAVID SCOTT of Georgia, Mr. CARTWRIGHT, Mr. MOULTON, Mr. VEASEY, Mr. CASTEN, Ms. SEWELL, Mr. KEATING, Ms. WILSON of Florida, Mr. SARBANES, Ms. NORTON, Mr. COSTA, Mr. TONKO, Mr. SCHIFF, Ms. WILD, Mr. CARBAJAL, Ms. ADAMS, Mr. BOYLE of Pennsylvania, Ms. MCCOLLUM, Ms. JACOBS, Ms. TLAIB, Ms. MATSUI, Ms. ROSS, Mr. GALLEGRO, Ms. TITUS, Mr. MORELLE, Mr. ESPAILLAT, Ms. BROWN, Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN, Mr. DAVIS of Illinois, Mr. PHILLIPS, Mr. CARTER of Louisiana, Mr. CUELLAR, Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE, Ms. MENG, Ms. DELBENE, Mr. POCAN, Mr. MCGOVERN, Ms. STEVENS, Mr. BLUMENAUER, Mr. HIGGINS of New York, Mr. SHERMAN, Ms. ESHOO, Ms. WILLIAMS of Georgia, Ms. BUSH, Ms. SCANLON, Mr. LYNCH, Mr. MEEKS, Mr. PALLONE, Mr. RUIZ, and Mr. MOSKOWITZ) 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

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## 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, at  
20 a price sufficient to cover the cost thereof, including labor,  
21 materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses.

22 **SEC. 4. STATUS OF MEDALS.**

23 (a) NATIONAL MEDALS.—Medals struck pursuant to  
24 this Act are national medals for the purposes of chapter  
25 51 of title 31, United States Code.

1 (b) NUMISMATIC ITEMS.—For purposes of sections  
2 5134 and 5136 of title 31, United States Code, all medals  
3 struck under this Act shall be considered to be numismatic  
4 items.

5 **SEC. 5. AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS; PROCEEDS OF**  
6 **SALE.**

7 (a) AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS.—There is  
8 authorized to be charged against the United States Mint  
9 Public Enterprise Fund such amounts as may be nec-  
10 essary to pay for the costs of the medals struck under  
11 this Act.

12 (b) PROCEEDS OF SALE.—Amounts received from the  
13 sale of duplicate bronze medals authorized under section  
14 4 shall be deposited into the United States Mint Public  
15 Enterprise Fund.

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