

118TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 4360

To award a Congressional Gold Medal to Edward J. Dwight, Jr., the first African American astronaut candidate in the United States.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MAY 16, 2024

Mr. BENNET (for himself and Mr. HICKENLOOPER) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs

A BILL

To award a Congressional Gold Medal to Edward J. Dwight, Jr., the first African American astronaut candidate in the United States.

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. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Edward J. Dwight,
5 Jr. Congressional Gold Medal Act of 2024”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

8 (1) Edward Joseph Dwight, Jr., was born on
9 September 9, 1933, to Georgia Baker Dwight and

1 Edward Dwight, Sr., in Kansas City, Kansas. Ed
2 Senior had been a second baseman and center fielder
3 for the Kansas City Monarchs and played on other
4 all-Black teams from 1924 to 1937. Georgia was a
5 devoted mother who enrolled her son in a Head
6 Start type program at the age of 2 and made sure
7 to expose her children to as much culture as she
8 could.

9 (2) Edward Joseph Dwight, Jr., grew up with
10 a passion for art and airplanes.

11 (3) Edward became the first African American
12 male to graduate from Bishop Ward Catholic High
13 School in 1951. He then earned an associate degree
14 in engineering in 1953 from Kansas City Junior
15 College. That same year he left to join the Air Force
16 and began flight training.

17 (4) After completing flight training, he served
18 as a military pilot and obtained a degree in aero-
19 nautical engineering from Arizona State University.
20 During his career as an officer in the Air Force, Ed-
21 ward served at bases in Texas, Missouri, and Ari-
22 zona, developing technical manuals and training fel-
23 low pilots on various instruments, as he accumulated
24 flight hours.

1 (5) Edward recalled, “I was the only Black offi-
2 cer pilot just about every base I was stationed” and
3 that even at 5’4”, he “got award after award”.
4 While in the Air Force, Edward earned his Bachelor
5 of Science in aeronautical engineering from Arizona
6 State University in 1957.

7 (6) Edward flew some of the most advanced
8 aircraft of the era and ultimately accumulated over
9 9,000 hours of flight time, 2,000 in high-perform-
10 ance jets. His engineering background and extensive
11 training opened the door for him to enter the test
12 pilot school where the most successful trainees be-
13 come astronauts.

14 (7) Edward was chosen by President John F.
15 Kennedy to enter training as an experimental test
16 pilot. The Kennedy administration knew that a
17 Black astronaut would be an inspiring display of op-
18 portunity for African Americans across the country.

19 (8) On November 4, 1961, Edward received a
20 letter inviting him to join the astronaut training pro-
21 gram. He followed the advice of his mother and ac-
22 cepted the invitation to take the first steps toward
23 improving diversity and talent in the United States
24 space program by becoming the first African Amer-
25 ican astronaut candidate in the United States.

1 (9) Edward went to the Aerospace Research
2 Pilot School at Edwards Air Force Base in Cali-
3 fornia to begin training.

4 (10) This was a time of uncertainty where the
5 color of a person’s skin mattered more than his or
6 her skill.

7 (11) The astronaut candidacy of Edwards be-
8 came cover news on Black magazines such as Jet,
9 Ebony, and Sepia.

10 (12) At Edwards Air Force Base, however, Ed-
11 ward experienced prejudice and scorn, as he re-
12 counted in his autobiography “Soaring on the Wings
13 of a Dream: The Untold Story of America’s First
14 Black Astronaut Candidate”.

15 (13) Edward completed the experimental test
16 pilot course and entered aerospace research pilot
17 training in preparation for astronaut duties. He suc-
18 cessfully completed the course and continued to per-
19 form duties as a fully qualified aerospace research
20 pilot.

21 (14) On October 18, 1963, the National Aero-
22 nautics and Space Administration (referred to in
23 this section as “NASA”) announced 14 astronauts
24 for Group 3, but Edward did not make the list.

1 (15) While in training, Edward faced obstacles
2 due to his race, which derailed his chance to be the
3 first African American in space. His fight for equal-
4 ity was one of many trailblazing battles happening
5 during the Civil Rights Era.

6 (16) The assassination of President Kennedy,
7 the main sponsor in the White House of Edward
8 and the space journey, led to his voluntary separa-
9 tion from the Air Force.

10 (17) In 1966, Edward resigned from the Air
11 Force as a captain and moved to Denver, Colorado.

12 (18) After the Kennedy assassination, pressure
13 on NASA to fly a Black astronaut waned, and the
14 first African American would not fly in space until
15 Guion Bluford flew with the crew of NASA's eighth
16 space flight on the Space Shuttle orbiter Challenger
17 in 1983.

18 (19) After successful careers in the Air Force,
19 and as an IBM systems engineer, restaurateur,
20 aviation consultant, real estate, and construction en-
21 trepreneur, Edward dedicated the last 43 years sole-
22 ly to his artistic endeavors.

23 (20) In 1974, George Brown, the first African
24 American lieutenant governor of Colorado and a
25 member of the Tuskegee Airmen in World War II,

1 chose Edward to create a bronze bust of him to dis-
2 play in the Colorado State Capitol.

3 (21) Being a neophyte to bronze sculpting, and
4 at the age of 42, Edward enrolled at the University
5 of Denver in the Masters of Fine Arts program.
6 While at the University of Denver, he became pro-
7 ficient in metal casting and managed the foundry at
8 the school while also teaching other students. He re-
9 ceived his Master of Fine Arts in 1977.

10 (22) In 1975, while at the University of Den-
11 ver, Edward received a commission from the Colo-
12 rado Centennial Commission to create a series of
13 bronzes depicting the contribution of Blacks to the
14 American Frontier West. The series exhibited for
15 several years throughout the United States, gaining
16 widespread acceptance and critical acclaim.

17 (23) In 1979, the National Park Service en-
18 couraged Edward to create a bronze series por-
19 traying the history and historical roots of jazz. The
20 series was created and entitled “Jazz: An American
21 Art Form”, which consisted of over 70 bronzes de-
22 picting the evolution of jazz from its African origins
23 to the fusion of contemporary music.

24 (24) Since his art career began in 1976, Ed-
25 ward has become one of most prolific and insightful

1 sculptors in the United States. As of the date of en-
2 actment of this Act, Edward has completed more
3 than 115 large-scale commissioned sculpture instal-
4 lations. His pieces are collected by museums, institu-
5 tions and art enthusiasts around the world, includ-
6 ing the Smithsonian. Ed Dwight Studios, Inc., in
7 Denver, is now one of the largest privately-owned
8 production facilities in the western United States.

9 (25) Edward is the recipient of numerable liv-
10 ing legends awards from around the country for his
11 achievements in space activities and contributions in
12 art and Black history.

13 (26) On August 5, 2020, in recognition of his
14 accomplishments as a scientist, test pilot, and sculp-
15 tor, the Space Force inducted him as an honorary
16 member. A permanent display is installed at the
17 Pentagon in honor of these achievements.

18 (27) In a ceremony at the Pentagon, General
19 Jay Raymond, Chief of Space Operations of the
20 Space Force, presented Edward with the Com-
21 mander's Public Service Award and inducted him as
22 an honorary member of the Space Force, for his
23 contributions to the United States, space, and his-
24 tory during times of overt racism in the field of
25 science. Astronaut Victor Glover honored Edward by

1 carrying this award with him to the International
2 Space Station during his Crew-1 mission. Despite
3 all that he had to overcome, Edward was an example
4 of excellence, embarking on a nationwide speaking
5 tour encouraging young people to study science, en-
6 gineering, and math.

7 (28) In 2021, the Minor Planet Center, an or-
8 ganization affiliated with the International Astro-
9 nomical Union, named an asteroid after Edward.
10 NASA has honored him by sending his sculpture
11 “Pioneer Woman” to space on Exploration Flight
12 Test-1 in 2014.

13 (29) On November 3, 2022, Denver Inter-
14 national Airport opened an exhibit titled “Soaring
15 on the Wings of a Dream,” the title of Edward’s
16 book. The exhibit is on the life of Edward, beginning
17 with childhood and ending with adulthood. It will be
18 on display for 5 months.

19 (30) The National Geographic documentary,
20 “The Space Race”, weaves together the stories of
21 Black astronauts seeking to break the bonds of so-
22 cial injustice to reach for the stars, including Ed-
23 ward, Guion Bluford, Charles Bolden, Mae C.
24 Jemison, Victor Glover, among many others, includ-
25 ing Leland Melvin, one of the producers of the film.

1 (31) On May 19, 2024, Edward, sponsored by
2 Space for Humanity, will finally travel to space on
3 board Blue Origin New Shepard rocket. At 90 years
4 old, Edward will be the oldest person in space and
5 will train with his crewmates for 2 days before liftoff
6 at the Blue Origin Launch Site One in western
7 Texas.

8 **SEC. 3. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL.**

9 (a) PRESENTATION AUTHORIZED.—The Speaker of
10 the House of Representatives and the President pro tem-
11 pore of the Senate shall make appropriate arrangements
12 for the presentation, on behalf of Congress, of a single
13 gold medal of appropriate design to Edward J. Dwight,
14 the first African-American astronaut candidate in the
15 United States, in recognition of—

16 (1) his historic service to the United States;

17 (2) the example of excellence during times of
18 struggle and overt racism; and

19 (3) his contributions in art and Black history.

20 (b) DESIGN AND STRIKING.—For purposes of the
21 presentation described in subsection (a), the Secretary of
22 the Treasury (referred to in this Act as the “Secretary”)
23 shall strike a gold medal with suitable emblems, devices,
24 and inscriptions, to be determined by the Secretary. The

1 design shall bear an image of, and an inscription of the
2 name of, Edward J. Dwight, Jr.

3 (c) DISPOSITION OF MEDAL.—Following the presen-
4 tation described in subsection (a), the gold medal shall be
5 given to Edward J. Dwight, Jr., or, if unavailable, to Cur-
6 tis Christopher Dwight.

7 **SEC. 4. DUPLICATE MEDALS.**

8 The Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in
9 bronze of the gold medal struck under section 3, at a price
10 sufficient to cover the costs thereof, including labor, mate-
11 rials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses.

12 **SEC. 5. STATUS OF MEDALS.**

13 (a) NATIONAL MEDALS.—Medals struck under this
14 Act are national medals for purposes of chapter 51 of title
15 31, United States Code.

16 (b) NUMISMATIC ITEMS.—For purposes of sections
17 5134 and 5136 of title 31, United States Code, all medals
18 struck under this Act shall be considered to be numismatic
19 items.

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

22 (a) AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS.—There is
23 authorized to be charged against the United States Mint
24 Public Enterprise Fund such amounts as may be nec-

1 essary to pay for the costs of the medals struck under
2 this Act.

3 (b) PROCEEDS OF SALE.—Amounts received from the
4 sale of duplicate bronze medals authorized under section
5 4 shall be deposited into the United States Mint Public
6 Enterprise Fund.

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