

118TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 547

To award a Congressional Gold Medal, collectively, to the First Rhode Island Regiment, in recognition of their dedicated service during the Revolutionary War.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

FEBRUARY 28, 2023

Mr. WHITEHOUSE (for himself, Mr. CASSIDY, Mr. REED, Mr. GRAHAM, Mr. BENNET, Mr. CRAMER, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Mr. SULLIVAN, Mr. CASEY, Ms. DUCKWORTH, Ms. HASSAN, Mr. MARKEY, Mr. MURPHY, Ms. WARREN, and Mr. WARNER) 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, collectively, to the First Rhode Island Regiment, in recognition of their dedicated service during the Revolutionary War.

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 “First Rhode Island
5 Regiment Congressional Gold Medal Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

1 (1) During the winter at Valley Forge, from
2 1777–1778, the Continental Army had difficulty re-
3 cruiting the necessary quotas of men set by the Con-
4 gress.

5 (2) At the same time, the State of Rhode Island
6 was ordered to supply two battalions while faced
7 with the occupation of the City of Newport by the
8 British.

9 (3) In January 1778, at the urging of Brigadier
10 General James Varnum, General George Washington
11 wrote to Governor Nicholas Cooke of the State of
12 Rhode Island requesting assistance recruiting men
13 for the Continental Line.

14 (4) On February 14, 1778, the Rhode Island
15 General Assembly voted to allow the enlistment of
16 “every able-bodied negro, mulatto, or Indian man
17 slave”.

18 (5) In addition, the Rhode Island General As-
19 sembly provided that any enlisted slave “upon his
20 passing muster before Colonel Christopher Greene,
21 be immediately discharged from the service of his
22 master or mistress, and be absolutely free as though
23 he had never been incumbered and be incumbered
24 with any kind of servitude or slavery”.

1 (6) As a result, between February 1778 and
2 June 1778, Colonel Christopher Greene, Lt. Colonel
3 Jeremiah Olney and Major Samuel Ward recruited
4 almost 200 men of African heritage and Indigenous
5 descent who formed the core of the First Rhode Is-
6 land Regiment.

7 (7) The First Rhode Island Regiment became
8 among the first units in American History in which
9 men of every race and ethnicity were recruited to
10 serve.

11 (8) On August 28, 1778, at the Battle of
12 Rhode Island, following an attempted siege of Brit-
13 ish-occupied Newport along with the newly allied
14 French fleet, the First Rhode Island Regiment acted
15 heroically in holding back Hessian forces and caus-
16 ing them to retreat.

17 (9) During the Battle of Rhode Island, the
18 First Rhode Island Regiment's losses included three
19 killed, nine wounded and eleven missing soldiers.

20 (10) Soldiers of color from the First Rhode Is-
21 land Regiment continued to fight bravely to win
22 American independence for 5 more years in an inte-
23 grated Rhode Island Regiment that included men of
24 African, European, and Indigenous descent.

1 (11) On December 25, 1783, the last Rhode Is-
2 land soldiers were discharged at Saratoga, New
3 York.

4 (12) Their commander, Colonel Jeremiah
5 Olney, praised the Regiment for “faithfully pre-
6 serving in the best of causes, in every stage of serv-
7 ice, with unexampled fortitude and patience through
8 all the danger and toils of a long and severe war”.

9 (13) Afterwards, some veterans of the First
10 Rhode Island Regiment had to consistently resist ef-
11 forts at re-enslavement and fought for back wages
12 from the Rhode Island General Assembly.

13 (14) According to the Rhode Island State Ar-
14 chives, the First Rhode Island Regiment included at
15 least the following soldiers: Babcock, Priamus (Pri-
16 mus); Bent, Prince; Bours, Cato; Brown, Priamus
17 (Primus); Burk, Africa; Burroughs, John; Car-
18 penter, Cudgo; Champlin, Dick; Champlin, Jack;
19 Champlin, July; Champlin, Newport; Champlin,
20 Sharper; Champlin, York; Clark, James;
21 Coddington, Jack; Fones, Jack; Gardner, Cuff;
22 Gardner, Hercules; Gardner, Minkl; Gardner,
23 Preamus (Primus); Gardner, Rutter; Gray, Ebe-
24 nezer; Green, Cuff; Greene, Cato; Greene, Jack;
25 Greene, Pero; Greene, William; Hammond, Prince;

1 Harriss, Cesar; Hazard, Backus; Hazard, Jabin;
 2 Hazard, Jacob; Hazard, Peter; Hazard, Peter;
 3 Lefavour, Thom; Mason, Warsen; Mawney, Cyrus;
 4 Minturn, Jack; Mowrey, Pero; Nichols, Thomas;
 5 Perry, Ganset; Phillips, Philow; Pierce, Titus; Pot-
 6 ter, David; Randall, Prince; Rhodes, Bristol; Rhodes,
 7 Priamus; Rhodes, Richard; Rhodes, Samuel; Rich-
 8 mond, Ebenezer; Robinson, Mingo; Rodman, Isaac;
 9 Rodman, Mingo; Rodman, Prince; Rose, Cesar;
 10 Saltonstall, Brittain; Saunders, Sampson; Sheldon,
 11 Cesar; Slave; Slave; Smith, Juba; Sweeling, Query;
 12 Talbot, Sigby; Tanner, Quam; Tillinghast, Cuff;
 13 Updike, Cesar; Updike, Moses; Vaughan, Prince;
 14 Vernon, Cato; Watson, Fortune; Wells, Cesar;
 15 Wickes, Nat; and Willbour, Boston.

16 **SEC. 3. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL.**

17 (a) AWARD AUTHORIZED.—The Speaker of the
 18 House of Representatives and the President pro tempore
 19 of the Senate shall make appropriate arrangements for the
 20 award, on behalf of the Congress, of a single gold medal
 21 of appropriate design to the First Rhode Island Regiment,
 22 collectively in recognition of their dedicated service during
 23 the Revolutionary War.

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 the gold medal with suitable emblems,
3 devices, and inscriptions, to be determined by the Sec-
4 retary.

5 (c) RHODE ISLAND STATE LIBRARY.—

6 (1) IN GENERAL.—Following the award of the
7 gold medal in honor of the First Rhode Island Regi-
8 ment of the Revolutionary War under subsection (a),
9 the gold medal shall be given to the Rhode Island
10 State Library, where it will be displayed as appro-
11 priate and made available for research.

12 (2) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of
13 Congress that the Rhode Island State Library
14 should make the gold medal received under para-
15 graph (1) available for display elsewhere, particu-
16 larly at other appropriate locations associated with
17 the First Rhode Island Regiment of the Revolu-
18 tionary War.

19 **SEC. 4. DUPLICATE MEDALS.**

20 The Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in
21 bronze of the gold medal struck under section 3, at a price
22 sufficient to cover the costs of the medals, including labor,
23 materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses.

1 **SEC. 5. STATUS OF MEDALS.**

2 (a) NATIONAL MEDALS.—Medals struck pursuant to
3 this Act are national medals for purposes of chapter 51
4 of title 31, United States Code.

5 (b) NUMISMATIC ITEMS.—For purposes of sections
6 5134 and 5136 of title 31, United States Code, all medals
7 struck under this Act shall be considered to be numismatic
8 items.

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

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

16 (b) PROCEEDS OF SALE.—Amounts received from the
17 sale of duplicate bronze medals authorized under section
18 4 shall be deposited into the United States Mint Public
19 Enterprise Fund.

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