

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 3420

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 SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

DECEMBER 16, 2021

Mr. WARNOCK 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 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. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Freedom Riders Con-
5 gressional Gold Medal Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 The Congress finds the following:

1 (1) In 1960, the Supreme Court ruled in Boynton v. Virginia that segregated bus and rail stations
2 were unconstitutional.
3

4 (2) The rigid system of racial segregation that
5 prevailed in the United States during the 1960s did
6 not permit a Black person to sit next to a White
7 person on any bus traveling through interstate commerce and in most locations in the South. Bus stations had “Whites Only” waiting areas and Blacks
8 were not permitted to wait in those areas despite the
9 Supreme Court making it the law of the land.
10

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

18 (4) The Congress of Racial Equality (C.O.R.E.)
19 selected thirteen volunteers for nonviolent response
20 training to join in the Freedom Rides from Washington, DC, to New Orleans, LA. The Freedom Riders used their strategies of nonviolence throughout
21 the South to challenge the region’s Jim Crow laws
22 directly and enforce the Supreme Court decision in
23 Boynton.
24
25

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

15 (6) Initially, the Freedom Riders had encoun-
16 tered only minor clashes until a stop in South Caro-
17 lina. In Rock Hill, an angry mob severely beat John
18 Lewis, late Congressman from the 5th District of
19 Georgia, when he entered the bus station. Henry
20 “Hank” Thomas was jailed when he entered the bus
21 station in Winnsboro. Authorities delivered him to a
22 waiting mob long after the station had closed that
23 evening. A local Black minister rescued Thomas, en-
24 abling him to rejoin the group in Columbia. How-

1 ever, Lewis was so badly beaten he could not con-
2 tinue the Freedom Rides.

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

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

23 (9) The Nashville (TN) Student Group, a local
24 group of students who had been successful in deseg-
25 regating the lunch counters and movie theaters in

1 Nashville (TN), vowed not to let these acts of vio-
2 lence curtail the goal of the Freedom Rides. They
3 sent their members to continue the Freedom Rides
4 and called out to other student groups to do the
5 same.

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

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

22 (12) Five months after the first Freedom Rid-
23 ers left on their historic ride, the Interstate Com-
24 merce Commission in conjunction with the U.S. At-
25 torney General Robert Kennedy issued a Federal

1 order banning segregation at all interstate public fa-
2 cilities based upon “race, color or creed”. The law
3 became effective on November 1, 1961.

4 (13) In 2011, Barack Obama, the President of
5 the United States paid tribute to the Freedom Rid-
6 ers with a Presidential proclamation honoring the
7 50th anniversary of the first Freedom Ride by brave
8 Americans whose selfless act of courage helped pave
9 the way for others to continue on the road to Civil
10 Rights in America.

11 **SEC. 3. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL.**

12 (a) PRESENTATION AUTHORIZED.—The Speaker of
13 the House of Representatives and the President pro tem-
14 pore of the Senate shall make appropriate arrangements
15 for the presentation, on behalf of Congress, of a gold
16 medal of appropriate design to the Freedom Riders, collec-
17 tively, in recognition of their unique contribution to Civil
18 Rights, which inspired a revolutionary movement to equal-
19 ity in interstate travel.

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

1 (c) SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.—

2 (1) IN GENERAL.—Following the award of the
3 gold medal under subsection (a), the gold medal
4 shall be given to the Smithsonian Institution, where
5 the medal shall be available for display as appro-
6 priate and available for research.

7 (2) SENSE OF THE CONGRESS.—It is the sense
8 of Congress that the Smithsonian Institution should
9 make the gold medal received under paragraph (1)
10 available for display elsewhere, particularly at appro-
11 priate locations associated with the Freedom Riders.

12 **SEC. 4. DUPLICATE MEDALS.**

13 The Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in
14 bronze of the gold medal struck pursuant to section 2
15 under such regulations as the Secretary may prescribe, at
16 a price sufficient to cover the cost thereof, including labor,
17 materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses.

18 **SEC. 5. STATUS OF MEDALS.**

19 (a) NATIONAL MEDALS.—The medals struck pursu-
20 ant to this Act are national medals for purposes of chapter
21 51 of title 31, United States Code.

22 (b) NUMISMATIC ITEMS.—For purposes of section
23 5134 of title 31, United States Code, all medals struck
24 under this Act shall be considered to be numismatic items.

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

3 (a) **AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS.**—There is
4 authorized to be charged against the United States Mint
5 Public Enterprise Fund such amounts as may be nec-
6 essary to pay for the costs of the medals struck pursuant
7 to this Act.

8 (b) **PROCEEDS OF SALE.**—The amounts received
9 from the sale of duplicate bronze medals authorized under
10 section 4 shall be deposited into the United States Mint
11 Public Enterprise Fund.

○