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(Original Signature of Member)

119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. _____

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

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on _____

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.

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

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

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

23 (5) On the morning of May 4, 1961, the Free-
24 dom Riders, comprised of seven Blacks and six
25 Whites, boarded two buses, with Blacks and Whites

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

12 (6) Initially, the Freedom Riders had encoun-
13 tered only minor clashes until a stop in South Caro-
14 lina. In Rock Hill, an angry mob severely beat John
15 Lewis, late Congressman from the 5th District of
16 Georgia, when he entered the bus station. Henry
17 “Hank” Thomas was jailed when he entered the bus
18 station in Winnsboro. Authorities delivered him to a
19 waiting mob long after the station had closed that
20 evening. A local Black minister rescued Thomas, en-
21 abling him to rejoin the group in Columbia. How-
22 ever, Lewis was so badly beaten he could not con-
23 tinue the Freedom Rides.

24 (7) Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and other civil
25 rights leaders met with the group in Atlanta to dis-

1 suade their continuance through the Deep South due
2 to death threats. Despite these warnings, more Free-
3 dom Riders joined in Atlanta. Dedicated to their
4 mission to end segregation in the South and trained
5 in nonviolent movements, the Freedom Riders con-
6 tinued on their journey.

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

19 (9) The Nashville (TN) Student Group, a local
20 group of students who had been successful in deseg-
21 regating the lunch counters and movie theaters in
22 Nashville (TN), vowed not to let these acts of vio-
23 lence curtail the goal of the Freedom Rides. They
24 sent their members to continue the Freedom Rides

1 and called out to other student groups to do the
2 same.

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

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

19 (12) Five months after the first Freedom Riders
20 left on their historic ride, the Interstate Commerce
21 Commission in conjunction with the U.S. Attorney
22 General Robert Kennedy issued a Federal
23 order banning segregation at all interstate public facilities
24 based upon “race, color or creed”. The law
25 became effective on November 1, 1961.

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

8 **SEC. 2. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL.**

9 (a) PRESENTATION AUTHORIZATION.—The Speaker
10 of the House of Representatives and the President pro
11 tempore of the Senate shall make appropriate arrange-
12 ments for the presentation, on behalf of the Congress, of
13 a gold medal of appropriate design to the Freedom Riders,
14 collectively, in recognition of their unique contribution to
15 Civil Rights, which inspired a revolutionary movement to
16 equality in interstate travel.

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

23 (c) SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.—

24 (1) IN GENERAL.—Following the award of the
25 gold medal under subsection (a), the gold medal

1 shall be given to the Smithsonian Institution, where
2 it will be available for display as appropriate and
3 available for research.

4 (2) SENSE OF THE CONGRESS.—It is the sense
5 of the Congress that the Smithsonian Institution
6 should make the gold medal awarded pursuant to
7 this Act available for display elsewhere, particularly
8 at appropriate locations associated with the Freedom
9 Riders.

10 **SEC. 3. DUPLICATE MEDALS.**

11 The Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in
12 bronze of the gold medal struck pursuant to section 2, at
13 a price sufficient to cover the cost thereof, including labor,
14 materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses.

15 **SEC. 4. STATUS OF MEDALS.**

16 (a) NATIONAL MEDALS.—Medals struck pursuant to
17 this Act are national medals for the purposes of chapter
18 51 of title 31, United States Code.

19 (b) NUMISMATIC ITEMS.—For purposes of sections
20 5134 and 5136 of title 31, United States Code, all medals
21 struck under this Act shall be considered to be numismatic
22 items.

1 **SEC. 5. 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 under
7 this Act.

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