

HENRY C. "HANK" JOHNSON, JR.
4TH DISTRICT, GEORGIA

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House of Representatives
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June 22, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden,

We are writing to urge you to award the Presidential Medal of Freedom to the Freedom Riders collectively for their heroic acts during the Civil Rights Movement. This year marks the 60th anniversary of the original Freedom Rides, which took place on May 4, 1961. Of the 13 original Freedom Riders, only two currently survive. Their heroism, sacrifice, and contribution to our country has improved the lives of millions, furthered the goal of equal rights, and has withstood the test of time. We owe these heroic Americans a debt of gratitude and believe they have earned our nation's highest civilian award, the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

The Freedom Rides, which began with 13 men and women on May 4, 1961, ultimately lasted for seven months, from May to November 1961, and grew to include more than 400 Black and White Americans who risked their lives to challenge Jim Crow laws – particularly segregated public transportation and interstate travel – in the South. They traveled on regularly scheduled buses to test a 1960 Supreme Court decision that declared segregated facilities for interstate passengers to be illegal. They protested segregated bus terminals, tried to use “whites-only” restrooms and lunch counters at bus stations in Alabama, South Carolina, and other Southern states. These heroic Americans were confronted by hostile police officers as well as horrific violence from white protestors along their routes. After news stories and photographs of burning buses and bloody attacks sped around the country, many more people came forward to risk their lives and challenge the racial status quo. Ultimately, they drew national and international attention to the Civil Rights Movement.

The 13 original Freedom Riders, who departed on the morning of May 4, 1961, were: Genevieve Hughes Houghton, Charles Person, Hank Thomas, the late Representative John Lewis, Edward Blankenheim, James Farmer, Walter Bergman, Frances Bergman, Joseph Perkins, Jimmy McDonald, Mae Francis Moultrie, Benjamin Elton Cox, and Albert Bigelow. Mr. Person and Mr. Thomas are the only surviving original freedom riders. More than 400 Americans ultimately participated in subsequent freedom rides, demonstrating the deep commitment to improving racial equality and ending Jim Crow, and the power of non-violent action.

The Freedom Riders' contributions to the nonviolent Civil Rights Movement are exemplary and worth of the highest honors. We therefore recommend that the Freedom Riders receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson Jr.
Member of Congress

ALMA ADAMS
Member of Congress

SANFORD D. BISHOP, JR.
Member of Congress

ANDRE CARSON
Member of Congress

YVETTE D. CLARKE
Member of Congress

JIM COOPER
Member of Congress

DANNY K. DAVIS
Member of Congress

DEBBIE DINGELL
Member of Congress

AL GREEN
Member of Congress

KAREN BASS
Member of Congress

EARL BLUMENAUER
Member of Congress

DAVID CICILLINE
Member of Congress

GERALD E. CONNOLLY
Member of Congress

SHARICE L. DAVIDS
Member of Congress

MADELEINE DEAN
Member of Congress

DWIGHT EVANS
Member of Congress

RAÚL M. GRIJALVA
Member of Congress

JAHANA HAYES
Member of Congress

PRAMILA JAYAPAL
Member of Congress

JAMES R. LANGEVIN
Member of Congress

ALAN LOWENTHAL
Member of Congress

CAROLYN B. MALONEY
Member of Congress

JAMES P. MCGOVERN
Member of Congress

JERROLD NADLER
Member of Congress

JAMIE RASKIN
Member of Congress

JAN SCHAKOWSKY
Member of Congress

BRAD SHERMAN
Member of Congress

ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON
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RO KHANNA
Member of Congress

BARBARA LEE
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NANCY MACE
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BETTY MCCOLLUM
Member of Congress

GWEN MOORE
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AYANNA PRESSLEY
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BOBBY L. RUSH
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DARREN SOTO
Member of Congress

THOMAS R. SUOZZI

Member of Congress

DINA TITUS

Member of Congress

RASHIDA TLAIB

Member of Congress

RICHIE TORRES

Member of Congress

JUAN VARGAS

Member of Congress

NIKEMA WILLIAMS

Member of Congress

FREDERICA S. WILSON

Member of Congress