

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 4703

To require the Secretary of the Treasury to mint coins to honor and memorialize the tragedy of the Sultana Steamboat explosion of 1865, which is the greatest maritime disaster in United States history.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JULY 27, 2021

Mr. CRAWFORD (for himself and Mr. WESTERMAN) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Financial Services

A BILL

To require the Secretary of the Treasury to mint coins to honor and memorialize the tragedy of the Sultana Steamboat explosion of 1865, which is the greatest maritime disaster in United States history.

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 “Sultana Steamboat
5 Disaster Commemorative Coin Act of 2021”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 The Congress finds the following:

1 (1) On April 27, 1865, the Sultana, a Mis-
2 sissippi River paddlewheel steamboat, exploded kill-
3 ing nearly 1,200 of the 2,137 passengers and crew
4 on board. Based on the number of recorded casual-
5 ties, this event is the worst maritime disaster in
6 United States history.

7 (2) The Sultana was launched on January 3,
8 1863, and was built for speed and capacity. Its four
9 tubular, fire-tube boilers could generate twice as
10 much steam per fuel load as conventional fuel boilers
11 at that time. However, these advantages came with
12 shortcomings in safety. In a tubular boiler system,
13 the water levels had to always be maintained. Any
14 slight dip in the water would cause sediment build
15 up around the boilers or lead to hot spots on the
16 boilers leading to metal fatigue. Both occurrences
17 greatly increased the risk of explosion. Additionally,
18 the Sultana was built with highly flammable light-
19 weight wood that was covered with paint and var-
20 nish. The likelihood of any such explosion would be
21 devastating.

22 (3) Those aboard the boat were mostly paroled
23 Union soldiers having been taken prisoners of war
24 and sent to the notoriously overcrowded Confederate
25 prisons of Cahaba in Alabama and Andersonville in

1 Georgia. These men largely hailed from the States
2 of Ohio, Tennessee, Indiana, Michigan, Kentucky,
3 and West Virginia. The POWs that survived these
4 prisons at the end of the Civil War in April 1865
5 were marched to Vicksburg, Mississippi, for their re-
6 turn north.

7 (4) The Union army was paying the Sultana's
8 captain \$5 for each enlisted man and \$10 for each
9 officer taken aboard. The Sultana originally was
10 only built for a capacity of 376 people, and now
11 found itself crowded with 2,137 people.

12 (5) Bound for Cairo, Illinois, and forcing itself
13 against the strong Mississippi River current, the
14 Sultana was ten miles upriver from Memphis, Ten-
15 nessee, at 2 a.m., when the strained boilers ex-
16 ploded. Many were killed instantly by the explosion;
17 many others were killed by fire, falling timbers,
18 shrapnel, searing steam from the boilers, and drown-
19 ing.

20 (6) The remains of the Sultana took about
21 twenty minutes to burn to the waterline and resting
22 in the mud on the Arkansas-side of the Mississippi
23 River. It is believed to be buried today under twenty
24 feet of soil beneath a soybean field near Marion, Ar-
25 kansas, in Crittenden County.

1 (7) Many of the dead were buried in Memphis
2 cemeteries. Bodies of the deceased that could be
3 identified were taken home where cemetery markers
4 pay tribute.

5 (8) The Sultana disaster was overshadowed in
6 the press by other major events surrounding the end
7 of the American Civil War, including the assassina-
8 tion of President Abraham Lincoln on April 15,
9 1865, and subsequently, the killing of President Lin-
10 coln's assassin, John Wilkes Booth, on April 26,
11 1865, just one day before the Sultana disaster.

12 (9) A small group in Marion, Arkansas, formed
13 the Sultana Historical Preservation Society and
14 opened a modest museum in 2015. The Society, a
15 501(c)(3) organization, is now planning a new Sul-
16 tana Disaster Museum to be located in the center of
17 the City of Marion, at the site of the original Marion
18 Public School gymnasium, a Works Progress Admin-
19 istration era building opened in 1939.

20 (A) On April 27, 2021, the 156th anniver-
21 sary of the steamboat explosion, the Society an-
22 nounced an initial \$7.5 million capital campaign
23 to fund the new museum. The goal has since in-
24 creased to \$14 million to accommodate up-
25 graded exhibit designs.

1 (B) The future museum will commemorate
2 and honor those who experienced the horrific
3 disaster and preserve a piece of United States
4 history.

5 (C) The museum is projected to attract
6 50,000 visitors to Marion, Arkansas, annually,
7 with tourists projected to contribute over \$3.5
8 million in spending in the surrounding cities.

9 (10) The commemorative coins will contribute
10 to additional funding for the future Sultana disaster
11 museum, while recognizing and remembering this
12 historical tragedy and those who perished in the ex-
13 plosion.

14 **SEC. 3. COIN SPECIFICATIONS.**

15 (a) DENOMINATIONS.—In recognition and remem-
16 brance of the tragedy of the Sultana Steamboat explosion
17 of 1865, which is the greatest maritime disaster in United
18 States history, the Secretary of the Treasury (hereafter
19 in this Act referred to as the “Secretary”) shall mint and
20 issue the following coins:

21 (1) \$5 GOLD COINS.—Not more than 100,000
22 \$5 coins, which shall—

23 (A) weigh 8.359 grams;

24 (B) be struck on a planchet having a di-
25 ameter of 0.850 inches; and

1 (C) contain not less than 90 percent gold.

2 (2) \$1 SILVER COINS.—Not more than 500,000

3 \$1 coins, which shall—

4 (A) weigh 26.73 grams;

5 (B) be struck on a planchet having a di-
6 ameter of 1.500 inches; and

7 (C) contain not less than 90 percent silver.

8 (3) HALF-DOLLAR CLAD COINS.—Not more
9 than 750,000 half-dollar coins which shall—

10 (A) weigh 11.34 grams;

11 (B) be struck on a planchet having a di-
12 ameter of 1.205 inches; and

13 (C) be minted to the specifications for half-
14 dollar coins contained in section 5112(b) of title
15 31, United States Code.

16 (b) LEGAL TENDER.—The coins minted under this
17 Act shall be legal tender, as provided in section 5103 of
18 title 31, United States Code.

19 (c) NUMISMATIC ITEMS.—For purposes of sections
20 5134 and 5136 of title 31, United States Code, all coins
21 minted under this Act shall be considered to be numis-
22 matic items.

23 **SEC. 4. DESIGNS OF COINS.**

24 (a) DESIGNS REQUIREMENTS.—

1 (1) IN GENERAL.—The designs of the coins
2 minted under this section shall be emblematic of the
3 historical significance of the Sultana disaster, with
4 special recognition and remembrance to the lives
5 lost, including the recently released Union soldiers
6 returning home after having been prisoners of war
7 during the American Civil War at Confederate pris-
8 ons located at Andersonville and Cahaba.

9 (2) DESIGNATION AND INSCRIPTIONS.—On
10 each coin minted under this Act there shall be—

11 (A) a designation of the denomination of
12 the coin;

13 (B) an inscription of the year “2023”; and

14 (C) inscriptions of the words “Liberty”,
15 “In God We Trust”, “United States of Amer-
16 ica”, and “E Pluribus Unum”.

17 (b) SELECTION.—The designs of the coins minted
18 under this Act shall be—

19 (1) selected by the Secretary after consultation
20 with—

21 (A) the Commission of Fine Arts; and

22 (B) the Sultana Historical Preservation
23 Society, Inc.; and

24 (2) reviewed by the Citizens Coinage Advisory
25 Committee.

1 **SEC. 5. ISSUANCE OF COINS.**

2 (a) **QUALITY OF COINS.**—Coins minted under this
3 Act shall be issued in uncirculated and proof qualities.

4 (b) **PERIOD FOR ISSUANCE.**—The Secretary may
5 issue coins, to the public, minted under this Act only dur-
6 ing the 1-year period beginning on January 1, 2023.

7 **SEC. 6. SALE OF COINS.**

8 (a) **SALE PRICE.**—The coins issued under this Act
9 shall be sold by the Secretary at a price equal to the sum
10 of—

11 (1) the face value of the coins;

12 (2) the surcharge provided in section 7(a) with
13 respect to such coins; and

14 (3) the cost of designing and issuing the coins
15 (including labor, materials, dies, use of machinery,
16 winning design compensation, overhead expenses,
17 marketing, and shipping).

18 (b) **PREPAID ORDERS.**—

19 (1) **IN GENERAL.**—The Secretary shall accept
20 prepaid orders for the coins minted under this Act
21 before the issuance of such coins.

22 (2) **DISCOUNT.**—Sale prices with respect to pre-
23 paid orders under paragraph (1) shall be at a rea-
24 sonable discount.

25 (c) **MARKETING AND EDUCATIONAL CAMPAIGN.**—
26 The Secretary shall develop and execute a marketing, pro-

1 motion, and educational program to promote the collecting
2 of the coins authorized under this Act.

3 **SEC. 7. SURCHARGES.**

4 (a) IN GENERAL.—All sales of coins minted under
5 this Act shall include a surcharge as follows:

6 (1) A surcharge of \$35 per coin for the \$5 gold
7 coin.

8 (2) A surcharge of \$10 per coin for the \$1 sil-
9 ver coin.

10 (3) A surcharge of \$5 per coin for the half-dol-
11 lar coin.

12 (b) DISTRIBUTION.—Subject to section 5134(f) of
13 title 31, United States Code, all surcharges received by
14 the Secretary from the sale of coins issued under this Act
15 shall be promptly paid to the Sultana Historical Preserva-
16 tion Society, Inc., for the purpose of establishing and
17 maintaining a new Sultana disaster museum.

18 (c) AUDITS.—The surcharge recipient under sub-
19 section (b) shall be subject to the audit requirements of
20 section 5134(f)(2) of title 31, United States Code, with
21 regard to the amounts received under subsection (b).

22 (d) LIMITATION.—Notwithstanding subsection (a),
23 no surcharge may be included with respect to the issuance
24 under this Act of any coin during a calendar year if, as
25 of the time of such issuance, the issuance of such coin

1 would result in the number of commemorative coin pro-
2 grams issued during such year to exceed the annual com-
3 memorative coin program issuance limitation under sec-
4 tion 5112(m)(1) of title 31, United States Code (as in ef-
5 fect on the date of the enactment of this Act). The Sec-
6 retary of the Treasury may issue guidance to carry out
7 this subsection.

8 **SEC. 8. FINANCIAL ASSURANCES.**

9 The Secretary shall take such actions as may be nec-
10 essary to ensure that—

11 (1) minting and issuing coins under this Act
12 will not result in any net cost to the United States
13 Government; and

14 (2) no funds, including applicable surcharges,
15 are disbursed to any recipient designated in section
16 7 until the total cost of designing and issuing all of
17 the coins authorized by this Act (including labor,
18 materials, dies, use of machinery, winning design
19 compensation, overhead expenses, marketing, and
20 shipping) is recovered by the United States Treas-
21 ury, consistent with sections 5112(m) and 5134(f) of
22 title 31, United States Code.

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