

118TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 273

To posthumously award a Congressional Gold Medal, collectively, to the African Americans who served with Union forces during the Civil War, in recognition of their bravery and outstanding service.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

FEBRUARY 7, 2023

Mr. BOOKER introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs

A BILL

To posthumously award a Congressional Gold Medal, collectively, to the African Americans who served with Union forces during the Civil War, in recognition of their bravery and outstanding service.

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 “United States Colored
5 Troops Congressional Gold Medal Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

1 (1) Since the Colonial Era, African Americans
2 have served the United States in times of war.

3 (2) During the Civil War, approximately
4 200,000 African-American men served in the Union
5 Army and 19,000 African-American men served in
6 the Union Navy.

7 (3) During the Civil War, African-American
8 women were not allowed to formally enlist as soldiers
9 or sailors, though they served as nurses, cooks,
10 spies, and scouts for the Union Army and the Union
11 Navy.

12 (4) While African-American men served in the
13 Navy since its establishment, there was resistance to
14 enlisting them to take up arms for the Union Army
15 at the start of the Civil War.

16 (5) As the Civil War dragged on, President
17 Lincoln broke from the previous policy of his admin-
18 istration and determined that liberating enslaved
19 persons “was a military necessity absolutely essen-
20 tial for the salvation of the Union”.

21 (6) The Act entitled “An Act to suppress insur-
22 rection, to punish treason and rebellion, to seize and
23 confiscate the property of rebels, and for other pur-
24 poses”, approved July 17, 1862 (commonly known
25 as the “Second Confiscation Act”) (12 Stat. 589;

1 chapter 195), and the Act of July 17, 1862 (com-
2 monly known as the “Military Act of 1862”) (12
3 Stat. 597; chapter 201), were the first official au-
4 thorizations to employ African Americans in the
5 Union Army.

6 (7) It was not until January 1, 1863, the effec-
7 tive date of the Emancipation Proclamation issued
8 by President Lincoln, that the Union Army was or-
9 dered to receive African-American men.

10 (8) On May 22, 1863, the United States War
11 Department issued General Order Number 143,
12 which established the Bureau of Colored Troops for
13 the recruitment and organization of regiments of the
14 Union Army composed of African-American men,
15 called the United States Colored Troops (referred to
16 in this section as “USCT”).

17 (9) Leaders such as Frederick Douglass encour-
18 aged African Americans to enlist to advance the
19 cause of citizenship. “Once let the black man get
20 upon his person the brass letters, ‘U.S.’, let him get
21 an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoul-
22 der and bullets in his pocket, there is no power on
23 [E]arth that can deny that he has earned the right
24 to citizenship.”, wrote Douglass.

1 (10) African-American sailors constituted a sig-
2 nificant segment of the Union Navy, making up 20
3 percent of the total enlisted force of the Navy.

4 (11) Although there were rank restrictions on
5 African Americans in the Navy before the Civil War,
6 this policy changed after the establishment of the
7 USCT, when the Union Navy started to compete
8 with the Union Army for enlistment of African
9 Americans.

10 (12) Yet, in practice, most African Americans
11 could not advance beyond lowest ranks of “boy” and
12 “landsman”.

13 (13) African-American soldiers and sailors
14 served with distinction, honor, and bravery amid ra-
15 cial discrimination and adverse circumstances, in-
16 cluding the risk of enslavement and torture if cap-
17 tured.

18 (14) Eighteen members of the USCT and 8 Af-
19 rican-American sailors were awarded the Medal of
20 Honor, the highest honor in the United States for
21 bravery in combat.

22 (15) For generations after the Civil War, the
23 contributions of African Americans in the Civil War
24 were excluded from historical memory.

1 (16) Public Law No. 102–412 (106 Stat. 2104)
2 authorized the establishment of a memorial on Fed-
3 eral land in the District of Columbia to honor Afri-
4 can Americans who served with Union forces during
5 the Civil War.

6 (17) This memorial, featuring a bronze statue
7 of USCT soldiers, an African-American sailor and
8 family, is surrounded by the Wall of Honor, which
9 lists the names of the members of the USCT.

10 (18) The African American Civil War Museum
11 is located in the District of Columbia.

12 (19) Patriots and heroes who rose in service to
13 a Nation that would not fully recognize them, the
14 African Americans who served the Union during the
15 Civil War deserve our recognition for their contribu-
16 tions to the grant of emancipation and citizenship
17 for nearly 4,000,000 enslaved people and the preser-
18 vation of the Union.

19 **SEC. 3. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL.**

20 (a) PRESENTATION AUTHORIZED.—The Speaker of
21 the House of Representatives and the President pro tem-
22 pore of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Rep-
23 resentatives shall make appropriate arrangements for the
24 posthumous presentation, on behalf of Congress, of a gold
25 medal of appropriate design to the African Americans who

1 served with Union forces during the Civil War, collectively,
2 in recognition of their bravery and outstanding service
3 during the Civil War.

4 (b) DESIGN AND STRIKING.—For the purposes of the
5 presentation referred to in subsection (a), the Secretary
6 of the Treasury (hereafter in this Act referred to as the
7 “Secretary”) shall strike a gold medal with suitable em-
8 blems, devices, and inscriptions, to be determined by the
9 Secretary.

10 (c) SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.—

11 (1) IN GENERAL.—Following the award of the
12 gold medal under subsection (a), the gold medal
13 shall be given to the Smithsonian Institution, where
14 the medal shall be available for display as appro-
15 priate and made available for research.

16 (2) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of
17 Congress that the Smithsonian Institution should
18 make the gold medal received under paragraph (1)
19 available for display elsewhere, particularly at appro-
20 priate locations associated with the United States
21 Colored Troops.

22 **SEC. 4. DUPLICATE MEDALS.**

23 The Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in
24 bronze of the gold medal struck pursuant to section 3 at

1 a price sufficient to cover the cost thereof, including labor,
2 materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses.

3 **SEC. 5. STATUS OF MEDALS.**

4 (a) NATIONAL MEDALS.—The medals struck pursu-
5 ant to this Act are national medals for purposes of chapter
6 51 of title 31, United States Code.

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

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

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

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

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