

117TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. RES. 759

Honoring Boston Celtics legend Bill Russell, 11-time National Basketball Association champion, first Black head coach of the National Basketball Association, and civil rights activist.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

SEPTEMBER 13, 2022

Mr. MARKEY (for himself, Ms. WARREN, Ms. HASSAN, and Mr. REED)
submitted the following resolution; which was considered and agreed to

RESOLUTION

Honoring Boston Celtics legend Bill Russell, 11-time National Basketball Association champion, first Black head coach of the National Basketball Association, and civil rights activist.

Whereas William “Bill” Felton Russell was born on February 12, 1934, in West Monroe, Louisiana;

Whereas, after graduating from McClymonds High School in Oakland, California, in 1952, Russell was recruited to play basketball at the University of San Francisco;

Whereas, in 2 seasons, Russell led the University of San Francisco Dons men’s basketball team to a combined record of 57–1 and 2 national championships and was named most outstanding player of the 1955 National Collegiate Athletic Association Basketball Tournament;

Whereas, in the 1956 draft for the National Basketball Association (commonly known as the “NBA”), the Boston Celtics acquired Russell, who the St. Louis Hawks had selected with the second overall pick in the draft;

Whereas, at the 1956 Summer Olympics in Melbourne, Australia, Russell was the captain of the United States Men’s Olympic Basketball team, averaged a team-high 14.1 points per game, and led the United States to a gold medal victory over the Soviet Union;

Whereas, throughout his career in the NBA as a player and a coach, Russell earned an unprecedented number of awards and accolades, including—

(1) a record 11 NBA championships, received in years 1957, 1959, 1960, 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1968, and 1969;

(2) five Most Valuable Player awards, received in years 1958, 1961, 1962, 1963, and 1965;

(3) twelve All-Star designations, received in years 1958, 1959, 1960, 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1968, and 1969;

(4) three All-Star Game Most Valuable Player Awards, received in years 1959, 1963, and 1965; and

(5) an NBA Lifetime Achievement Award, received in 2017;

Whereas, in Game 7 of the 1957 NBA Finals between the Celtics and the St. Louis Hawks, during the final minute of regulation, Russell, who scored 19 points and had 32 rebounds, hit a left-handed lay-up and then chased down and blocked a shot in transition, forcing the first of 2 overtimes;

Whereas the Celtics won the game and championship in what fellow Celtics player Tom Heinsohn called the “greatest game ever”;

Whereas Russell was a player-coach for the Celtics from 1966 to 1969, making him the first Black head coach in the history of the 4 major professional sports leagues;

Whereas the strength, courage, and leadership of Russell extended beyond the basketball court to the fight against racism and for civil rights in the United States;

Whereas, in 1961, Russell led his teammates in a boycott of an NBA game in Lexington, Kentucky, to protest racism and discrimination after a local coffee shop refused to serve 2 Black Celtics players;

Whereas Russell marched with the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., during the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom;

Whereas, in 1963, Russell offered support for demonstrations against segregation in Boston public schools and addressed Black students taking part in a sit-in;

Whereas, on June 4, 1967, Russell took part in the Cleveland Summit, where he joined other prominent Black athletes to express solidarity with Muhammad Ali’s decision to refuse to join the Armed Forces upon being drafted to fight in the Vietnam War;

Whereas, on February 15, 2011, President Barack Obama awarded Russell the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor in the United States, stating that “Bill Russell, the man, is someone who stood up for the rights and dignity of all men. He marched with King; he stood by Ali. When a restaurant refused to serve the Black Celtics, he refused to play in the scheduled game.

He endured insults and vandalism, but he kept on focusing on making the teammates who he loved better players, and made possible the success of so many who would follow. And I hope that one day, in the streets of Boston, children will look up at a statue built not only to Bill Russell the player, but Bill Russell the man.”;

Whereas, on August 11, 2022, the NBA announced that it will honor the life and legacy Bill Russell by permanently retiring his uniform number, 6, throughout the league, making Russell the first player to have his number retired across the NBA;

Whereas Russell has earned the love, respect, admiration, and gratitude of the city of Boston, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and the United States; and

Whereas Russell passed away on July 31, 2022, at age 88:
Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the Senate—

2 (1) honors the legendary life of William “Bill”
3 Felton Russell, a giant on and off the basketball
4 court; and

5 (2) expresses sincere condolences to the family
6 and friends of Russell as the city of Boston, the
7 Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and the United
8 States mourn with them.

○