

114TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. _____

To award a Congressional Gold Medal to the Foot Soldiers who participated in Bloody Sunday, Turnaround Tuesday, or the final Selma to Montgomery Voting Rights March in March of 1965, which served as a catalyst for the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. SESSIONS (for himself, Mr. BOOKER, and Mr. SHELBY) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on

A BILL

To award a Congressional Gold Medal to the Foot Soldiers who participated in Bloody Sunday, Turnaround Tuesday, or the final Selma to Montgomery Voting Rights March in March of 1965, which served as a catalyst for the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

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) March 7, 2015, will mark 50 years since the
6 brave Foot Soldiers of the Voting Rights Movement
7 first attempted to march from Selma to Montgomery

1 on “Bloody Sunday” in protest against the denial of
2 their right to vote, and were brutally assaulted by
3 Alabama state troopers.

4 (2) Beginning in 1964, members of the Student
5 Nonviolent Coordinating Committee attempted to
6 register African-Americans to vote throughout the
7 state of Alabama.

8 (3) These efforts were designed to ensure that
9 every American citizen would be able to exercise
10 their constitutional right to vote and have their
11 voices heard.

12 (4) By December of 1964, many of these efforts
13 remained unsuccessful. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,
14 working with leaders from the Student Nonviolent
15 Coordinating Committee and the Southern Christian
16 Leadership Conference, began to organize protests
17 throughout Alabama.

18 (5) On March 7, 1965, over 500 voting rights
19 marchers known as “Foot Soldiers” gathered on the
20 Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama in peace-
21 ful protest of the denial of their most sacred and
22 constitutionally protected right—the right to vote.

23 (6) Led by John Lewis of the Student Non-
24 violent Coordinating Committee and Rev. Hosea
25 Williams of the Southern Christian Leadership Con-

1 ference, these Foot Soldiers began the march to-
2 wards the Alabama State Capitol in Montgomery,
3 Alabama.

4 (7) As the Foot Soldiers crossed the Edmund
5 Pettus Bridge, they were confronted by a wall of
6 Alabama state troopers who brutally attacked and
7 beat them.

8 (8) Americans across the country witnessed this
9 tragic turn of events as news stations broadcasted
10 the brutality on a day that would be later known as
11 “Bloody Sunday.”

12 (9) Two days later on Tuesday, March 9, 1965,
13 nearly 2,500 Foot Soldiers led by Dr. Martin Luther
14 King risked their lives once more and attempted a
15 second peaceful march starting at the Edmund
16 Pettus Bridge. This second attempted march was
17 later known as “Turnaround Tuesday.”

18 (10) Fearing for the safety of these Foot Sol-
19 diers who received no protection from federal or
20 state authorities during this second march, Dr. King
21 led the marchers to the base of the Edmund Pettus
22 Bridge and stopped. Dr. King kneeled and offered a
23 prayer of solidarity and walked back to the church.

24 (11) President Lyndon B. Johnson, inspired by
25 the bravery and determination of these Foot Soldiers

1 and the atrocities they endured, announced his plan
2 for a voting rights bill aimed at securing the pre-
3 cious right to vote for all citizens during an address
4 to Congress on March 15, 1965.

5 (12) On March 17, 1965, one week after
6 “Turnaround Tuesday”, U.S. District Judge Frank
7 M. Johnson ruled the Foot Soldiers had a First
8 Amendment right to petition the government
9 through peaceful protest, and ordered federal agents
10 to provide full protection to the Foot Soldiers during
11 the Selma to Montgomery Voting Rights March.

12 (13) Judge Johnson’s decision overturned Ala-
13 bama Governor George Wallace’s prohibition on the
14 protest due to public safety concerns.

15 (14) On March 21, 1965, under the court
16 order, the U.S. Army, the federalized Alabama Na-
17 tional Guard, and countless federal agents and mar-
18 shals escorted nearly 8,000 Foot Soldiers from the
19 start of their heroic journey in Selma, Alabama to
20 their safe arrival on the steps of the Alabama State
21 Capitol Building on March 25, 1965.

22 (15) The extraordinary bravery and sacrifice
23 these Foot Soldiers displayed in pursuit of a peace-
24 ful march from Selma to Montgomery brought na-
25 tional attention to the struggle for equal voting

1 rights, and served as the catalyst for Congress to
2 pass the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which President
3 Johnson signed into law on August 6, 1965.

4 (16) To commemorate the 50th anniversary of
5 the Voting Rights Movement and the passage of the
6 Voting Rights Act of 1965, it is befitting that Con-
7 gress bestow the highest civilian honor, the Congres-
8 sional Gold Medal, in 2015, to the Foot Soldiers
9 who participated in Bloody Sunday, Turnaround
10 Tuesday or the final Selma to Montgomery Voting
11 Rights March during March of 1965, which served
12 as a catalyst for the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

13 **SEC. 2. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL.**

14 (a) PRESENTATION AUTHORIZED.—The Speaker of
15 the House of Representatives and the President Pro Tem-
16 pore of the Senate shall make appropriate arrangements
17 for the presentation, on behalf of Congress, of a gold
18 medal of appropriate design to the Foot Soldiers who par-
19 ticipated in Bloody Sunday, Turnaround Tuesday, or the
20 final Selma to Montgomery Voting Rights March during
21 March of 1965, which served as a catalyst for the Voting
22 Rights Act of 1965.

23 (b) DESIGN AND STRIKING.—For purposes of the
24 presentation referred to in subsection (a), the Secretary
25 of the Treasury (referred to in this Act as the “Sec-

1 retary”) shall strike a gold medal with suitable emblems,
2 devices, and inscriptions to be determined by the Sec-
3 retary.

4 (c) AWARD OF MEDAL.—Following the award of the
5 gold medal described in subsection (a), the medal shall be
6 given to the Selma Interpretative Center in Selma, Ala-
7 bama, where it shall be available for display or temporary
8 loan to be displayed elsewhere, as appropriate.

9 **SEC. 3. DUPLICATE MEDALS.**

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

16 **SEC. 4. STATUS OF MEDALS.**

17 (a) NATIONAL MEDALS.—The medals struck pursu-
18 ant to this Act are national medals for purposes of chapter
19 51 of title 31, United States Code.

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