

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 452

AN ACT

To award a Congressional Gold Medal to Willie O'Ree, in recognition of his extraordinary contributions and commitment to hockey, inclusion, and recreational opportunity.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

1 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

2 This Act may be cited as the “Willie O’Ree Congres-
3 sional Gold Medal Act”.

4 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

5 Congress finds the following:

6 (1) Willie O’Ree was the first Black player to
7 compete in the National Hockey League (NHL), ap-
8 pearing for the Boston Bruins on January 18, 1958,
9 in the throes of the civil rights movement in the
10 United States helping to end racial segregation in
11 the premier professional ice hockey league; he is
12 widely referred to as the “Jackie Robinson of Hock-
13 ey”.

14 (2) Willie O’Ree was born October 15, 1935, in
15 Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada; he is the
16 youngest of 13 children and a descendant of Paris
17 O’Ree, whose name appears in the famous historical
18 document “The Book of Negroes”.

19 (3) Willie O’Ree was raised by his parents in
20 Fredericton, a predominantly White town where
21 hockey was deeply rooted within the culture. O’Ree
22 was a standout athlete on the ice and the baseball
23 diamond.

24 (4) At age 21, O’Ree was being scouted by pro-
25 fessional baseball teams and seriously considered
26 baseball as a career. Upon experiencing the seg-

1 regated South for the first time while appearing for
 2 a minor league tryout, his dream changed and his
 3 attention turned solely to ice hockey.

4 (5) While playing amateur hockey, Willie was
 5 struck in his right eye with a puck and lost his eye-
 6 sight. He was told by doctors to abandon his hockey
 7 career; instead, never disclosing the extent of his in-
 8 jury, he pursued his dream of playing professional
 9 hockey.

10 (6) At the age of 22, O'Ree was called up from
 11 the Quebec Aces of the Quebec Hockey League
 12 (QHL) to play for the NHL's Boston Bruins at a
 13 time when only 6 teams existed in the league. O'Ree
 14 was unaware he had broken the color barrier at the
 15 top level of the sport until he read it in the news-
 16 paper the following day.

17 (7) Blind in 1 eye and a victim of racism at
 18 times throughout his career, O'Ree persevered and
 19 played professional hockey for 22 years, tallying over
 20 1,000 points.

21 (8) In 1996, 17 years after O'Ree retired from
 22 professional hockey, the National Hockey League
 23 hired O'Ree as the first-ever Diversity Ambassador.
 24 Having already changed the game forever through

1 his courage and convictions, O'Ree gives new defini-
2 tion to what it means to be a trailblazer.

3 (9) In this role as Diversity Ambassador with
4 the NHL, O'Ree set out to grow the sport by pro-
5 viding access, opportunity, and motivation for chil-
6 dren of all races, ethnicities, origins, and abilities.
7 With O'Ree providing a vivid example of what is
8 possible and serving as a relentless supporter of chil-
9 dren pursuing their dreams, more than 30 nonprofit
10 youth organizations, dubbed Hockey is for Everyone
11 programs, were developed across North America,
12 each committed to offering minority and under-
13 served children an opportunity to play hockey,
14 leveraging the sport to build character, foster posi-
15 tive values, and develop important life skills.

16 (10) Through Hockey is for Everyone pro-
17 grams, more than 120,000 boys and girls have been
18 positively impacted. O'Ree has devoted nearly 2,500
19 days on the ground with the youth participants, vis-
20 iting more than 500 schools, community centers, and
21 rinks to speak to hockey's core values and beliefs:
22 stay in school; set goals for yourself; remain com-
23 mitted and disciplined; and always respect your
24 teammates, coaches, and parents.

1 (11) Hockey is for Everyone programs have
2 provided important opportunities for youth to par-
3 take in physical fitness. Today in the United States,
4 fewer than half of the children ages 6–11 engage in
5 the recommended amount of physical activity, and
6 that number is lower for low-income families. O’Ree
7 has stood as a champion of youth athletic participa-
8 tion and its health benefits for decades.

9 (12) Hockey is for Everyone programs provide
10 numerous off-ice services to youth: SAT and aca-
11 demic tutoring, mentoring, nutrition education, col-
12 lege counseling, community service opportunities,
13 and more. The program has excelled at using hockey
14 as a vehicle to improve the social and emotional
15 wellness of youth and improve students’ academic
16 performances both in primary school and beyond.

17 (13) O’Ree was also named a Member of the
18 Order of Canada in 2008 and, in 2018, the City of
19 Boston released an official Proclamation recognizing
20 January 18, the anniversary of the day he broke
21 into the game, as “Willie O’Ree Day”.

22 (14) In November 2018, 60 years after O’Ree
23 entered the NHL, he was inducted into the Hockey
24 Hall of Fame in the “builder” category in recogni-
25 tion of his efforts to grow the game, using his posi-

1 tion and the platform of hockey to improve the lives
2 of children throughout North America.

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

4 (a) AWARD AUTHORIZED.—The Speaker of the
5 House of Representatives and the President pro tempore
6 of the Senate shall make appropriate arrangements for the
7 award, on behalf of the Congress, of a single gold medal
8 of appropriate design to Willie O'Ree, or if unavailable,
9 to a member of his family, in recognition of his extraor-
10 dinary contributions and commitment to hockey, inclusion,
11 and recreational opportunity.

12 (b) DESIGN AND STRIKING.—For the purposes of the
13 award referred to in subsection (a), the Secretary of the
14 Treasury (hereafter in this Act referred to as the “Sec-
15 retary”) shall strike the gold medal with suitable emblems,
16 devices, and inscriptions, to be determined by the Sec-
17 retary. The design shall bear an image of, and an inscrip-
18 tion of the name of, Willie O'Ree.

19 **SEC. 4. DUPLICATE MEDALS.**

20 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may strike and sell
21 duplicates in bronze of the gold medal struck under sec-
22 tion 3, at a price sufficient to cover the costs of the med-
23 als, including labor, materials, dies, use of machinery, and
24 overhead expenses.

1 (b) PROCEEDS OF SALES.—The amounts received
 2 from the sale of duplicate medals under subsection (a)
 3 shall be deposited in the United States Mint Public Enter-
 4 prise Fund.

5 (c) AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS.—There is
 6 authorized to be charged against the United States Mint
 7 Public Enterprise Fund such amounts as may be nec-
 8 essary to pay for the costs of the medals struck under
 9 this Act.

10 **SEC. 5. STATUS OF MEDALS.**

11 (a) NATIONAL MEDAL.—The medals struck pursuant
 12 to this Act are national medals for purposes of chapter
 13 51 of title 31, United States Code.

14 (b) NUMISMATIC ITEMS.—For purposes of section
 15 5134 of title 31, United States Code, all medals struck
 16 under this Act shall be considered to be numismatic items.

Passed the Senate July 27, 2021.

Attest:

Secretary.

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