

116TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 2504

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

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MAY 2, 2019

Mr. QUIGLEY (for himself, Ms. PRESSLEY, Mr. KATKO, Mr. EMMER, Mr. COOPER, Ms. JACKSON LEE, Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, Ms. BARRAGÁN, Mr. DAVID SCOTT of Georgia, Ms. SEWELL of Alabama, Mr. HIGGINS of New York, Mr. LIPINSKI, Mr. CUNNINGHAM, Ms. KELLY of Illinois, Mr. CASTEN of Illinois, Ms. MOORE, Ms. NORTON, Mr. DANNY K. DAVIS of Illinois, Mr. BUCSHON, Mr. STAUBER, Ms. MCCOLLUM, Ms. CLARKE of New York, Mr. MEEKS, Mr. PETERS, Mr. PAPPAS, Mr. BRINDISI, Mrs. LEE of Nevada, Mrs. MCBATH, Mr. FOSTER, Mr. YOUNG, Mr. RUSH, Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY, Mr. MCGOVERN, Mrs. TRAHAN, Mr. PHILLIPS, Mr. COLLINS of New York, Mr. KIND, Mr. LARSEN of Washington, Mr. GREEN of Texas, Mr. NEGUSE, Mr. LEVIN of Michigan, Mr. LEWIS, Mrs. LOWEY, Mr. KENNEDY, Mr. DELGADO, Mr. BRENDAN F. BOYLE of Pennsylvania, Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia, Mr. PASCRELL, Mr. BERGMAN, Mr. ESPAILLAT, Mr. LYNCH, Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi, Mr. SIRES, Mr. HAGEDORN, and Ms. CLARK of Massachusetts) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Financial Services

A BILL

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,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

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

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

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

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

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

1 (4) At age 21, O'Ree was being scouted by pro-
2 fessional baseball teams and seriously considered
3 baseball as a career. Upon experiencing the seg-
4 regated South for the first time while appearing for
5 a minor league tryout, his dream changed and his
6 attention turned solely to ice hockey.

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

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

20 (7) Blind in 1 eye and a victim of racism at
21 times throughout his career, O'Ree persevered and
22 played professional hockey for 22 years, tallying over
23 1,000 points.

24 (8) In 1996, 17 years after O'Ree retired from
25 professional hockey, the National Hockey League

1 hired O'Ree as the first-ever Diversity Ambassador.
2 Having already changed the game forever through
3 his courage and convictions, O'Ree gives new defini-
4 tion to what it means to be a trailblazer.

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

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

1 mitted and disciplined; and always respect your
2 teammates, coaches, and parents.

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

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

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

24 (14) In November 2018, 60 years after O’Ree
25 entered the NHL, he was inducted into the Hockey

1 Hall of Fame in the “builder” category in recogni-
2 tion of his efforts to grow the game, using his posi-
3 tion and the platform of hockey to improve the lives
4 of children throughout North America.

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

6 (a) AWARD AUTHORIZED.—The Speaker of the
7 House of Representatives and the President pro tempore
8 of the Senate shall make appropriate arrangements for the
9 award, on behalf of the Congress, of a single gold medal
10 of appropriate design to Willie O’Ree, in recognition of
11 his extraordinary contributions and commitment to hock-
12 ey, inclusion, and recreational opportunity.

13 (b) DESIGN AND STRIKING.—For the purposes of the
14 award referred to in subsection (a), the Secretary of the
15 Treasury (hereafter in this Act referred to as the “Sec-
16 retary”) shall strike the gold medal with suitable emblems,
17 devices, and inscriptions, to be determined by the Sec-
18 retary.

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

20 Under such regulations as the Secretary may pre-
21 scribe, the Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in
22 bronze of the gold medal struck under section 3, at a price
23 sufficient to cover the costs of the medals, including labor,
24 materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses.

1 SEC. 5. STATUS OF MEDALS.

2 Medals struck pursuant to this Act are national med-
3 als for purposes of chapter 51 of title 31, United States
4 Code.

