

115TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 2989

To establish the Frederick Douglass Bicentennial Commission.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JUNE 21, 2017

Ms. NORTON (for herself and Mr. HARRIS) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

A BILL

To establish the Frederick Douglass Bicentennial
Commission.

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 “Frederick Douglass
5 Bicentennial Commission Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress makes the following findings:

8 (1) Born into slavery on the Eastern Shore of
9 Maryland in 1818 and given the name Frederick
10 Augustus Washington Bailey after his mother Har-

1 riet Bailey, Frederick Douglass has been called the
2 father of the civil rights movement.

3 (2) Douglass rose through determination, bril-
4 liance, and eloquence to shape the American Nation.
5 He was an abolitionist, human rights and women's
6 rights activist, orator, author, journalist, publisher,
7 and social reformer.

8 (3) Taught basic reading skills by his mistress
9 until she was forced to stop, Douglass continued to
10 teach himself to read and write and taught other
11 slaves to read despite risks including death.

12 (4) During the course of his remarkable life
13 Frederick Douglass escaped from slavery, became
14 internationally renowned for his eloquence in the
15 cause of liberty, and went on to serve the national
16 government in several official capacities.

17 (5) Forced to leave the country to avoid arrest
18 as an escaped slave, he returned to become a
19 staunch advocate of the Union cause and helped re-
20 cruit African-American troops for the Union Army,
21 including two of his sons, Charles and Lewis Doug-
22 lass. His personal relationship with Abraham Lin-
23 coln helped persuade the President to make emanci-
24 pation a cause of the Civil War.

1 (6) With the abolition of slavery at the close of
2 the Civil War, Douglass then turned his attention to
3 the full integration of African-Americans into the
4 political and economic life of the United States.
5 Committed to freedom, Douglass dedicated his life
6 to achieving justice for all Americans, in particular
7 African-Americans, women, and minority groups. He
8 envisioned America as an inclusive Nation strength-
9 ened by diversity and free of discrimination.

10 (7) Douglass served as an advisor to Presi-
11 dents. Abraham Lincoln referred to him as the most
12 meritorious man of the nineteenth century. Douglass
13 was appointed to several offices. He served as the
14 United States Marshal of the District of Columbia
15 under Rutherford B. Hayes' administration; Presi-
16 dent James Garfield appointed Douglass the District
17 of Columbia Recorder of Deeds. In 1889, President
18 Benjamin Harrison appointed Frederick Douglass to
19 be the United States minister to Haiti. He was also
20 appointed by President Grant to serve as Assistant
21 Secretary of the Commission of Inquiry to Santo
22 Domingo.

23 (8) Douglass lived in the District of Columbia
24 for 23 of his 57 years as a free man, and in recogni-
25 tion of his leadership and continuous fight for jus-

1 tice and freedom, his home, Cedar Hill, was estab-
2 lished as a National Historic Site in Anacostia, in
3 Southeast Washington, DC.

4 (9) The statue of Frederick Douglass in the
5 United States Capitol is a gift from the almost
6 700,000 residents of the District of Columbia.

7 (10) All Americans could benefit from studying
8 the life of Frederick Douglass, for Douglass dedi-
9 cated his own life to ensuring freedom and equality
10 for future generations of Americans. This Nation
11 should ensure that his tireless struggle, trans-
12 formative words, and inclusive vision of humanity
13 continue to inspire and sustain us.

14 (11) The year 2018 marks the bicentennial an-
15 niversary of the birth of Frederick Douglass, and a
16 commission should be established to study and rec-
17 ommend to Congress activities that are fitting and
18 proper to celebrate that anniversary in a manner
19 that appropriately honors Frederick Douglass.

20 **SEC. 3. ESTABLISHMENT.**

21 There is established a commission to be known as the
22 Frederick Douglass Bicentennial Commission (referred to
23 in this Act as the “Commission”).

24 **SEC. 4. DUTIES.**

25 The Commission shall have the following duties:

1 (1) To study activities that may be carried out
2 by the Federal Government to determine whether
3 the activities are fitting and proper to honor Fred-
4 erick Douglass on the occasion of the bicentennial
5 anniversary of Douglass' birth, including—

6 (A) the issuance of a Frederick Douglass
7 bicentennial postage stamp;

8 (B) the convening of a joint meeting or
9 joint session of Congress for ceremonies and ac-
10 tivities relating to Frederick Douglass;

11 (C) a rededication of the Frederick Doug-
12 lass National Historic Site, or other activity
13 with respect to the Site; and

14 (D) the acquisition and preservation of ar-
15 tifacts associated with Frederick Douglass.

16 (2) To recommend to Congress the activities
17 that the Commission considers most fitting and
18 proper to honor Frederick Douglass on such occa-
19 sion, and the entity or entities in the Federal Gov-
20 ernment that the Commission considers most appro-
21 priate to carry out such activities.

22 **SEC. 5. MEMBERSHIP.**

23 (a) **NUMBER AND APPOINTMENT.**—The Commission
24 shall be composed of 16 members appointed as follows:

1 (1) Two members, each of whom shall be a
2 qualified citizen described in subsection (b), ap-
3 pointed by the President.

4 (2) One member, who shall be a qualified cit-
5 izen described in subsection (b), appointed by the
6 President on the recommendation of the Governor of
7 Maryland.

8 (3) One member, who shall be a qualified cit-
9 izen described in subsection (b), appointed by the
10 President on the recommendation of the Governor of
11 Massachusetts.

12 (4) One member, who shall be a qualified cit-
13 izen described in subsection (b), appointed by the
14 President on the recommendation of the Governor of
15 New York.

16 (5) One member, who shall be a qualified cit-
17 izen described in subsection (b), appointed by the
18 President on the recommendation of the Mayor of
19 the District of Columbia.

20 (6) Three members, at least one of whom shall
21 be a Member of the House of Representatives, ap-
22 pointed by the Speaker of the House of Representa-
23 tives.

1 (7) Three members, at least one of whom shall
2 be a Senator, appointed by the majority leader of
3 the Senate.

4 (8) Two members, at least one of whom shall
5 be a Member of the House of Representatives, ap-
6 pointed by the minority leader of the House of Rep-
7 resentatives.

8 (9) Two members, at least one of whom shall
9 be a Senator, appointed by the minority leader of
10 the Senate.

11 (b) QUALIFIED CITIZEN.—A qualified citizen de-
12 scribed in this subsection is a private citizen of the United
13 States with—

14 (1) a demonstrated dedication to educating oth-
15 ers about the importance of historical figures and
16 events; and

17 (2) substantial knowledge and appreciation of
18 Frederick Douglass.

19 (c) TIME OF APPOINTMENT.—Each initial appoint-
20 ment of a member of the Commission shall be made before
21 the expiration of the 120-day period beginning on the date
22 of the enactment of this Act.

23 (d) CONTINUATION OF MEMBERSHIP.—If a member
24 of the Commission was appointed to the Commission as
25 a Member of Congress, and ceases to be a Member of Con-

1 gress, that member may continue to serve on the Commis-
2 sion for not longer than the 30-day period beginning on
3 the date that member ceases to be a Member of Congress.

4 (e) TERMS.—Each member shall be appointed for the
5 life of the Commission.

6 (f) VACANCIES.—A vacancy in the Commission shall
7 not affect the powers of the Commission but shall be filled
8 in the manner in which the original appointment was
9 made.

10 (g) BASIC PAY.—Members shall serve on the Com-
11 mission without pay.

12 (h) TRAVEL EXPENSES.—Each member shall receive
13 travel expenses, including per diem in lieu of subsistence,
14 in accordance with sections 5702 and 5703 of title 5,
15 United States Code.

16 (i) QUORUM.—Six members of the Commission shall
17 constitute a quorum but a lesser number may hold hear-
18 ings.

19 (j) CHAIR.—The Commission shall select a Chair
20 from among the members of the Commission.

21 (k) MEETINGS.—The Commission shall meet at the
22 call of the Chair. Periodically, the Commission shall hold
23 a meeting in Rochester, New York.

1 **SEC. 6. DIRECTOR AND STAFF.**

2 (a) DIRECTOR.—The Commission may appoint and
3 fix the pay of a Director and such additional personnel
4 as the Commission considers to be appropriate.

5 (b) APPLICABILITY OF CERTAIN CIVIL SERVICE
6 LAWS.—

7 (1) DIRECTOR.—The Director of the Commis-
8 sion may be appointed without regard to the provi-
9 sions of title 5, United States Code, governing ap-
10 pointments in the competitive service, and may be
11 paid without regard to the provisions of chapter 51
12 and subchapter III of chapter 53 of that title relat-
13 ing to classification and General Schedule pay rates.

14 (2) STAFF.—The staff of the Commission shall
15 be appointed subject to the provisions of title 5,
16 United States Code, governing appointments in the
17 competitive service, and shall be paid in accordance
18 with the provisions of chapter 51 and subchapter III
19 of chapter 53 of that title relating to classification
20 and General Schedule pay rates.

21 (c) DONATIONS.—The Commission may accept dona-
22 tions of supplies, money, and services to carry out its re-
23 sponsibilities.

24 **SEC. 7. POWERS.**

25 (a) HEARINGS AND SESSIONS.—The Commission
26 may, for the purpose of carrying out this Act, hold such

1 hearings, sit and act at such times and places, take such
2 testimony, and receive such evidence as the Commission
3 considers to be appropriate.

4 (b) POWERS OF MEMBERS AND AGENTS.—Any mem-
5 ber or agent of the Commission may, if authorized by the
6 Commission, take any action that the Commission is au-
7 thorized to take by this Act.

8 (c) OBTAINING OFFICIAL DATA.—The Commission
9 may secure directly from any department or agency of the
10 United States information necessary to enable the Com-
11 mission to carry out this Act. Upon request of the Chair
12 of the Commission, the head of that department or agency
13 shall furnish that information to the Commission.

14 (d) MAILS.—The Commission may use the United
15 States mails in the same manner and under the same con-
16 ditions as other departments and agencies of the United
17 States.

18 (e) ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT SERVICES.—Upon
19 the request of the Commission, the Administrator of Gen-
20 eral Services shall provide to the Commission, on a reim-
21 bursable basis, the administrative support services nec-
22 essary for the Commission to carry out its responsibilities
23 under this Act.

1 **SEC. 8. REPORTS.**

2 (a) INTERIM REPORTS.—The Commission may sub-
3 mit to Congress such interim reports as the Commission
4 considers to be appropriate.

5 (b) FINAL REPORT.—The Commission shall submit
6 a final report to Congress no later than December 1,
7 2017. The final report shall contain—

8 (1) a detailed statement of the findings and
9 conclusions of the Commission;

10 (2) the recommendations of the Commission;
11 and

12 (3) any other information that the Commission
13 considers to be appropriate.

14 **SEC. 9. TERMINATION.**

15 The Commission shall terminate 120 days after sub-
16 mitting the final report of the Commission pursuant to
17 section 8.

18 **SEC. 10. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**

19 There are authorized to be appropriated such sums
20 as may be necessary to carry out this Act.

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