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Commemorative Coins: An Overview

Commemorative coins are produced by the U.S. Mint pursuant to an act of Congress. These coins celebrate and honor American people, places, events, and institutions. Although they are considered legal tender, they are not minted for general circulation. Instead, they are designed to be collected and to help designated groups raise money.

Since 1892, Congress has authorized more than 150 commemorative coins. The first commemorative coin was authorized in 1892 for the Columbia Exposition in Chicago. Between 1954 and 1981, Congress did not authorize any new commemorative coins. In 1982, Congress restarted the commemorative coin program when it authorized a commemorative half dollar to recognize George Washington's 250th Birthday. Between 1982 and 1996—when Congress limited the Mint to issuing two coins per year, for coins minted after January 1, 1999, in an effort to restrict the number of coins minted each year—the number of commemorative coins minted was as high as six per year (1994).

"Beginning January 1, 1999, the Secretary may mint and issue commemorative coins under this section during any calendar year with respect to not more than 2 commemorative coin programs."
- 31 U.S.C. §5112(m)(1)

Authorizing Commemorative Coins

An act of Congress is required to authorize a commemorative coin. This legislation typically includes several features. These include

- findings that summarize the commemorative subject's history and importance;
- specifications for denominations, weight, and metallic makeup;
- design requirements, including required dates, words, and/or images;
- start and end date for minting coins and any other limitations;
- requirements for selling coins;
- coin surcharge and distribution to designated groups; and
- assurances that costs of the coin program are recouped by the U.S. Mint.

Table 1 lists authorized commemorative coins between 2021 and 2026. No coins were authorized for 2023. Currently, one coin has been authorized for 2025, and no coins have yet been authorized for 2026 or beyond.

Table I. Authorized Commemorative Coins

2021-2026

Year	Commemorative Coin
2021	Christa McAuliffe National Law Enforcement Museum
2022	Negro Leagues Baseball Centennial Purple Heart Hall of Honor
2023	No Commemorative Coins Authorized
2024	Greatest Generation Harriet Tubman Bicentennial
2025	United States Marine Corps 250 th Anniversary [Open]
2026	[Open] [Open]

Source: CRS examination of public laws.

Congressional Consideration

In some past Congresses, the House Committee on Financial Services has adopted a committee rule to prohibit (1) the scheduling of a subcommittee hearing on commemorative coin legislation unless two-thirds of the House cosponsored the measure, or (2) reporting a bill that did not meet minting regulations under 31 U.S.C. §5112. This requirement was not included in the committee rules adopted for recent Congresses. Protocols issued by the House majority leader in the 118th Congress limit the scheduling of commemorative coin bills. The protocols state, in part, that "[t]he Majority Leader shall only consider commemorative coin bills that receive at least 290 cosponsors and are submitted to the Committee on Financial Services to be scheduled for the Floor."

In recent Congresses, the Senate, Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee Rule 8 has required that "at least 67 Senators must cosponsor any ... commemorative coin bill or resolution before consideration by the Committee."

Designing Commemorative Coins

After Congress has authorized a commemorative coin, the U.S. Treasury begins the process of designing the coin. This process involves consultation with the Citizens Coinage Advisory Committee (CCAC) and a design recommendation by the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA).

Citizens Coinage Advisory Committee

Established by P.L. 108-15, the CCAC advises the Secretary of the Treasury on theme and design of all U.S. coins and medals. For commemorative coins, the CCAC

advises the Secretary with regard to events, persons, or places to be commemorated; the mintage level of coins; and commemorative coin designs.

The CCAC consists of 11 members appointed by the Secretary, with 4 persons appointed upon the recommendation of the congressional leadership (one each by the Speaker of the House, the House minority leader, the Senate majority leader, and the Senate minority leader). The CCAC meets several times each year to consider design suggestions for coins and medals. For each coin considered, the CCAC provides the Secretary with its recommended design, including a justification for why a certain design was chosen. Recommendations are then published to the committee's website, at <http://www.ccac.gov>.

U.S. Commission of Fine Arts

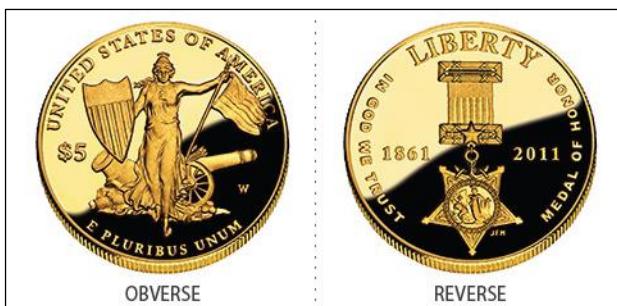
The U.S. Mint also makes a formal presentation of preferred designs to the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA), and CFA provides its recommendations to the Secretary of the Treasury. Established in 1910, the CFA's statutory authority pursuant to 40 U.S.C. §9102 is to "advise upon the location of statues, fountains, and monuments in the public squares, streets, and parks in the District of Columbia, the selection of models for statues, fountains, and monuments erected under the authority of the Federal Government; the selection of artists; and questions of art generally when required to do so by the President or a committee of Congress." This includes review of commemorative coins when they are presented by the U.S. Mint and the issuance of recommendations for a coin's design.

Minting Coins

After receiving advice from the CCAC and the CFA, the Secretary of the Treasury, through the U.S. Mint, finalizes the coin's design and then mints the coin at the appropriate time. For example, **Figure 1** shows the 2011 Medal of Honor Commemorative Coin.

Figure 1. 2011 Medal of Honor Commemorative Coin

\$5 Gold Proof



Source: U.S. Mint, "2011 Medal of Honor Commemorative Coin," at http://www.usmint.gov/mint_programs/commemoratives/?action=2011MedalHonor.

Commemorative Coin Funding

Generally, Congress does not appropriate funds for commemorative coins. Instead, the United States Mint Public Enterprise Fund (31 U.S.C. §5136) is used to pay for costs associated with commemorative coins (e.g., design,

striking, marketing). Once the coin is issued, the U.S. Mint is required, pursuant to P.L. 104-208 (Div. A, title 1, §529(b)) to recover its expenses before it can disburse potential surcharges to recipient organizations designated in a commemorative coin statute.

Designated Recipient Organizations

Pursuant to the Commemorative Coin Reform Act (P.L. 104-208), a designated recipient organization is "any organization designated, under any provision of law, as the recipient of any surcharge imposed on the sale of any numismatic item."

For designated recipient organizations, commemorative coin authorizing legislation generally provides the name(s) of the organization(s) that will benefit from the sale of the coin and how the surcharges will be divided. For example, the legislation authorizing a commemorative coin for the U.S. Marshals Service (P.L. 112-104) specified four groups to receive distribution from the program: the U.S. Marshals Museum, Inc., the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association Foundation, and the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund. The law also specified how much money the designated recipient organization should receive. For the Marshal Service Coin, the first \$5 million went to the U.S. Marshals Museum, and then the additional surcharges were divided equally among the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association Foundation, and the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund.

Disbursement of Surcharges

Once a commemorative coin has been authorized, certain requirements are placed on the designated recipient organization(s). As required by P.L. 104-208, designated recipient organizations are required to raise funds to match those provided by the commemorative coin surcharges, provide documentation to the Treasury that such funds have been raised, and be subject to an annual audit. Further, the law prohibits the proceeds of any surcharge from being used to influence coin legislation.

To provide more direct guidance on these requirements, the U.S. Mint has published the *Surcharge Recipient Organization's Compliance Procedures for Surcharge Eligibility & Payments*. This document provides guidance and examples for designated recipient organizations.

Additional Resources

For more information on commemorative coins, see CRS Report R44623, *Commemorative Coins: Background, Legislative Process, and Issues for Congress*. For more information on other options available to honor individuals, groups, and events, see CRS Report R43539, *Commemorations in Congress: Options for Honoring Individuals, Groups, and Events*.

Jacob R. Straus, Specialist on the Congress

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