

Earl Z. Buddy Carter

(Original Signature of Member)

119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. _____

To award a Congressional Gold Medal to the fallen patriots of Thiokol,
in recognition of their sacrifice and contribution to the Nation.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. CARTER of Georgia introduced the following bill; which was referred to
the Committee on _____

A BILL

To award a Congressional Gold Medal to the fallen patriots
of Thiokol, in recognition of their sacrifice and contribu-
tion to the Nation.

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 “Thiokol Memorial Gold
5 Medal Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

1 (1) On February 3, 1971, a catastrophic explo-
2 sion occurred at the Thiokol plant in Woodbine,
3 Georgia, during trip flare manufacturing operations
4 in Building —132.

5 (2) The blast tragically claimed the lives of 29
6 people, many of whom were African American
7 women, and injured over 50 others.

8 (3) In May 1973, another worker, a 2-tour
9 Vietnam veteran, died in a separate mortar shell ex-
10 plosion at the same facility.

11 (4) These individuals served the United States
12 in accordance with article I, section 8, clauses 12
13 and 16 of the Constitution, manufacturing essential
14 munitions as civilian contractors during the Vietnam
15 War.

16 (5) The 30 fallen patriots of Thiokol include—

17 (A) Celia A. Alberta (Woodbine, GA);

18 (B) Ethel L. Banks (Woodbine, GA);

19 (C) Annie C. Booth (Kingsland, GA);

20 (D) Gloria W. Booth (Kingsland, GA);

21 (E) Bertha Walker Brunswick (Woodbine,
22 GA);

23 (F) Bettie Dawson Burch (Kingsland,
24 GA);

25 (G) Charles Burch (Kingsland, GA);

- 1 (H) James L. Chapman (Marshall, TX);
2 (I) Yvonne Marie Connelly (Kingsland,
3 GA);
4 (J) Jack Cox (Longview, TX);
5 (K) Mae Hazel Davis (St. Marys, GA);
6 (L) Mildred Davis (Blackshear, GA);
7 (M) Howard Ellis, Sr. (Woodbine, GA);
8 (N) Willie Mae Austell-Fuller (Kingsland,
9 GA);
10 (O) Pearlie Mae Young-Hutchinson (White
11 Oak, GA);
12 (P) Annie Mae Hutchinson-James
13 (Woodbine, GA);
14 (Q) Mack Kennedy (White Oak, GA);
15 (R) Essie Diana Green-King (Kingsland,
16 GA);
17 (S) Gracie Mae Small-Life (White Oak,
18 GA);
19 (T) Bertha Mae Hill (Woodbine, GA);
20 (U) Charles T. Monak (Montgomery, AL);
21 (V) James Parland (Woodbine, GA);
22 (W) Sandra Regina Rauls (Kingsland,
23 GA);
24 (X) Cyrus Emory Roberson (Nahunta,
25 GA);

1 (Y) Betty Jean Roberts (Yulee, FL);
2 (Z) Lillie Bell Spells (St. Marys, GA);
3 (AA) Cheryl N. Sullivan (Woodbine, GA);
4 (BB) Mae Alice Taylor (Yulee, FL);
5 (CC) Annie Loise Williams (St. Marys,
6 GA); and
7 (DD) Joseph Eugene Wainwright (White
8 Oak, GA).

9 (6) In the early 1960s, Camden County in
10 southeast Georgia was chosen as the primary loca-
11 tion for the Thiokol Chemical Corporation's produc-
12 tion of solid propellant rocket motors, in line with
13 President John F. Kennedy's vision of sending an
14 American to the moon by the end of the century.

15 (7) By 1965, the facility successfully test-fired
16 what was then considered the most powerful rocket
17 in the United States. America realized this vision in
18 1969.

19 (8) After halting rocket motor production, the
20 Woodbine Thiokol Chemical Plant shifted its focus
21 to manufacturing pesticides, trip flares, CS-2 gas,
22 81 mm munitions, and other military supplies dur-
23 ing the Vietnam War.

24 (9) The tragic explosion at the Thiokol Plant
25 remains the worst industrial accident in southeast

1 Georgia and ranks among the 10 deadliest in United
2 States history over the past century. The blast
3 sparked a fire that consumed approximately 200
4 acres of surrounding forest and destroyed several
5 buildings.

6 (10) In the immediate aftermath of the dis-
7 aster, the City of Jacksonville's Emergency Control
8 Center intercepted a distress message, leading to an
9 unprecedented response. Emergency personnel from
10 16 cities and 14 hospitals, including the United
11 States Army, Navy, Coast Guard, civilian helicopter
12 pilots, police officers, firefighters, nurses, and doc-
13 tors, mobilized to provide rescue and medical care.
14 On February 10, 1971, the Honorable Charles Ben-
15 nett, a member of the United States House of Rep-
16 resentatives, recognized the United States Navy for
17 their humanitarian efforts in response to the South-
18 east Georgia disaster; "Navy Heroes Assist in Hu-
19 manitarian Work in Southeast Georgia Disaster".

20 (11) As a result of the emergency and tragic
21 loss of life, America eliminated accepted practices
22 like hospital segregated patient rooms (SPR) and
23 segregated funeral home-operated ambulatory serv-
24 ices. Congress established the Occupational Safety
25 and Health Administration (OSHA) in April 1971,

1 and OSHA swiftly implemented workplace stand-
2 ards. In the aftermath, the lack of interstate trans-
3 portation from Savannah, Georgia, to the Georgia-
4 Florida State line prompted the immediate construc-
5 tion and completion of Interstate 95 through that
6 area.

7 (12) During the civil case Flossie Marie Massey
8 vs. The United States of America, the Justice De-
9 partment reformed mass tort litigation, leading to
10 the formula used today to assess the value of a
11 human life lost.

12 (13) Taking inspiration from the words of the
13 late President Jimmy Carter, “the workers must be
14 recognized for their contribution to the Nation”, the
15 State of Georgia declared a Day of Remembrance
16 for the Thiokol Plant Workers in 2015. The work-
17 ers, members of the United Chemical Workers
18 Union 832, were pioneers of a racially integrated
19 workforce. The manufacturers of the trip flares were
20 females, earning equal hourly wages and helping to
21 shape the modern American workplace. These wom-
22 en’s contribution came before Congress enacted
23 ERA in 1972. Their efforts not only supported the
24 liberation of South Vietnam, but also, saved the lives
25 of thousands of American soldiers.

1 (14) In August 2019, the Harrietts Bluff Inter-
2 change at Interstate 95, exit 7, was dedicated and
3 memorialized as the “Patriots of Thiokol” Inter-
4 change in honor of the workers’ dedication, resil-
5 ience, and embrace of American ingenuity. Their
6 contributions transformed the Southeastern economy
7 and established a workplace rooted in dignity, diver-
8 sity, and equality. Daily, they traveled along
9 Harriets Bluff Road, commonly known as “Thiokol
10 Road”, fulfilling a mission that changed lives and
11 shaped history.

12 (15) On February 3, 2023, the State of Georgia
13 formally recognized the 30 fallen munition manufac-
14 turers from the plant as distinguished citizens. Their
15 sacrifice led to significant improvements in transpor-
16 tation, emergency medical services, mass tort litiga-
17 tion, and industrial safety standards. The State of
18 Georgia honored the 30 patriots who lost their lives
19 at the Woodbine Thiokol Chemical Plant and com-
20 mended the courage of the first responders and sur-
21 vivors.

22 (16) The legacy of these 30 fallen patriots con-
23 tinues through the efforts of the Thiokol Memorial
24 Project and the documentary “The Day That Shook
25 Georgia”. This film pays tribute to survivors and

1 first responders, winning the Southeast Chapter
2 Emmy® in Historical/Cultural - Long-form Content.

3 (17) To join the State of Georgia in recognizing
4 these patriots, Congress posthumously bestows the
5 Congressional Gold Medal upon the 30 Fallen Patri-
6 ots of Thiokol.

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

8 (a) AWARD AUTHORIZED.—The Speaker of the
9 House of Representatives and the President pro tempore
10 of the Senate shall make appropriate arrangements for the
11 award, on behalf of Congress, of a single gold medal of
12 appropriate design to the fallen patriots of Thiokol, in rec-
13 ognition of their sacrifice and contribution to the Nation.

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

19 (c) DISPOSITION OF MEDAL.—Following the award
20 of the gold medal under subsection (a), the medal shall
21 be given to the Thiokol Memorial Museum, where it shall
22 be available for display and made available for research.

23 **SEC. 4. DUPLICATE MEDALS.**

24 The Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in
25 bronze of the gold medal struck under section 3, at a price

1 sufficient to cover the costs thereof, including labor, mate-
2 rials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses.

3 **SEC. 5. STATUS OF MEDALS.**

4 (a) NATIONAL MEDALS.—Medals struck under this
5 Act are national medals for purposes of chapter 51 of title
6 31, United States Code.

7 (b) NUMISMATIC ITEMS.—For purposes of sections
8 5134 and 5136 of title 31, United States Code, all medals
9 struck under this Act shall be considered to be numismatic
10 items.

11 **SEC. 6. AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS; PROCEEDS OF**
12 **SALE.**

13 (a) AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS.—There is
14 authorized to be charged against the United States Mint
15 Public Enterprise Fund such amounts as may be nec-
16 essary to pay for the costs of the medals struck under
17 this Act.

18 (b) PROCEEDS OF SALE.—Amounts received from the
19 sale of duplicate bronze medals authorized under section
20 4 shall be deposited into the United States Mint Public
21 Enterprise Fund.