

# CRS Report for Congress

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## A Guide to Major Congressional and Presidential Awards

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### Summary

This report is designed to help congressional offices obtain information about major awards given by Congress and the President. It lists details about the establishment, criteria, selection process, and presentation of each of the major presidential and congressional awards: Congressional Award, Congressional Gold Medal, Medal of Honor, Presidential Citizens Medal, and Presidential Medal of Freedom. Brief entries are provided for additional awards made by the President including two new military medals for service in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT): the GWOT Expeditionary Medal and the GWOT Service Medal. Contact information is provided for the organization responsible for making the award and for more data about an award. References to CRS products on awards are also given. This report will be updated as necessary.

### Congressional Awards

**Congressional Award.** The Congressional Award Program was established in 1979 to promote initiative, achievement, and excellence among youths age 14 to 23. Award recipients have completed a self-designed program of challenging but achievable goals in four program areas: voluntary service, personal development, physical fitness, and expedition/exploration. There is no limit on the number of Congressional Awards; it is a noncompetitive, individual achievement.

Program participants can work toward a Congressional Award Certificate or Medal. In either category there are three achievement levels: gold, silver, and bronze. Minimum requirements must be met regarding the number of hours devoted to each of the four program areas, total hours worked toward the award, and for the duration of the participant's efforts. Senators and Representatives present the awards at local, city, or state ceremonies. Gold medal recipients are recognized each year at the Congressional Award Gold Ceremony at the U.S. Capitol.

The Congressional Award was originally authorized in P.L. 96-114, which set up the Congressional Award Foundation to manage the Award program, and was reauthorized

in 1999 by P.L. 106-63. Funds for the program are received through charitable contributions. Three awards are associated with the Congressional Award. The Leadership Award is presented by Congress to individuals in recognition of their extraordinary contributions to the nation's youth, particularly for efforts related to the Congressional Award Program. At its annual gala, the Congressional Award Foundation presents the Horizon Award to individuals to recognize their contributions to expanding opportunities for young people, either through their actions or by the example set by their life's successes. In 2000, the Congressional Award Act was amended by P.L. 106-533, to establish a Congressional Recognition for Excellence in Arts Education. This act established a nine-member congressional board to recognize schools that promote excellence in arts education. The foundation may be contacted as follows:

Congressional Award Foundation  
P.O. Box 77440  
Washington, DC 20013  
Tel: (202) 226-0130; Fax: (202) 226-0131  
To request a brochure: 1-888-80-AWARD  
Internet: [<http://www.congressionalaward.org>]  
E-mail: [information@congressionalaward.org](mailto:information@congressionalaward.org)

**Congressional Gold Medal.** The Congressional Gold Medal is considered "the nation's highest civilian award and the most distinguished award" given by the U.S. Congress. It may be given to recognize a lifetime contribution or a singular achievement. No statutory provisions govern the award; the medal is awarded irregularly, when merited. Legislation authorizing each medal must be passed by Congress and signed by the President. Each gold medal is individually designed and struck by the U.S. Mint. Although only one gold medal is made, in most cases, legislation also provides for the production and sale of duplicate bronze medals.

The Congressional Gold Medal was initially awarded to military leaders. The first medal, authorized in 1776, was given to George Washington. Following the establishment of new military awards, notably the Medal of Honor, the Congressional Gold Medal was used to recognize achievements in many fields, including world and space exploration, science, medicine, arts, entertainment, and humanitarian and public service. Congressional Gold Medals have been awarded to individuals, groups of individuals, foreign citizens, and to one organization, the American Red Cross.

Additional information on the Congressional Gold Medal, including a list of recipients, is provided in CRS Report RL30076, *Congressional Gold Medals, 1776-2003*. Congressional Gold Medal legislation is under the jurisdiction of the House of Representatives Committee on Financial Services' Subcommittee on Domestic Monetary Policy, Technology, and Economic Growth and the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs. For additional information, contact the committees:

Committee on Financial Services  
Subcommittee on Domestic Monetary Policy, Technology, and Economic Growth  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515  
Tel: (202) 226-0473  
[<http://financialservices.house.gov>]

Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs  
 U.S. Senate  
 Washington, DC 20510  
 Tel: (202) 224-7391  
 [<http://www.banking.senate.gov>]

**Medal of Honor.** This award, the nation's highest military honor, is presented by the President "in the name of Congress," and for that reason is sometimes referred to as the Congressional Medal of Honor.

The Medal of Honor was established by Congress during the Civil War to recognize soldiers who had distinguished themselves by their gallantry in action. It is the nation's highest military honor, awarded for acts of personal bravery or self-sacrifice that are above and beyond the call of duty. Recommendations for the Medal of Honor are generally made by the military commander or others on the scene at the time of the act. These recommendations are reviewed by the Department of Defense (DOD), which makes the final determination on awards. In addition to the prestige associated with the Medal of Honor, recipients receive additional small courtesies and benefits, including a \$1,000 monthly pension and access to certain military base privileges.

The Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs 1979 publication, *Medal of Honor Recipients, 1863-1978*, lists the names and citations of award for recipients. This data is updated through the Somalian Action in 1993 in the privately published book, *United States of America's Congressional Medal of Honor Recipients and Their Official Citations* (Columbia Heights, MN: Highland House II, 1994). A detailed history, current procedures for making the award, and a complete list of privileges afforded to Medal of Honor recipients are provided in CRS Report 95-519, *Medal of Honor: History and Issues*. Award recipients and citations since 1979 are listed in CRS Report RL30011, *Medal of Honor Recipients: 1979-2003*. Additional information is available from

Congressional Medal of Honor Society  
 40 Patriots Point Road  
 Mt. Pleasant, SC 29464  
 Tel: (843) 884-8862; Fax: (843) 884-1471  
 [<http://www.cmohs.org>]

**Additional Congressional Awards and Medals.** Two awards are given at the discretion of individual Members. The U.S. Senate Productivity Award recognizes the achievements of organizations in productivity, customer service, or other areas depending on the criteria adopted by the Senator. Each Senator may award one per year. The Medal of Merit may be awarded by Members of Congress to recognize the achievements of constituents as they see fit. Both awards are funded privately and have been used by only a few Members.

## Presidential Awards

**Presidential Medal of Freedom.** The Presidential Medal of Freedom is considered the highest civilian award of the United States government. President Truman first awarded the Medal of Freedom to reward war-connected acts or services during World War II. It was later re-established by President Kennedy in Executive Order 11085

of February 22, 1963, to recognize persons who have made especially meritorious contributions to the security or national interests of the United States; to world peace; or to cultural or other significant public or private endeavors. There are two degrees of the Medal, the higher being the Presidential Medal of Freedom with distinction.

Honorees are selected solely by the President, either acting on his own initiative or based on recommendations made to him. As such, recipients tend to reflect the personal and political interests of the President. The accomplishments of past recipients have been in wide-ranging fields, including public service, journalism, business, sports, and entertainment. The award is presented by the President, generally at a White House ceremony, and may be awarded posthumously.

Lists of Presidential Medal of Freedom recipients are available in several books, such as the annual *Time Almanac* (Boston, Information Please) and *The Presidential Medal of Freedom* (Washington, Congressional Quarterly, 1996).

**Presidential Citizens Medal.** In Executive Order 11494 of November 13, 1969, President Nixon established the Presidential Citizens Medal to recognize U.S. citizens who have performed exemplary deeds of service for their country or fellow citizens. It is generally considered the second highest civilian award of our government. The Presidential Citizens Medal is bestowed at the sole discretion of the President and is usually presented by him. Past recipients were recognized for their contributions in a variety of areas, including human rights, the civil rights movement, national security, space exploration, religion, government service, and the environment. The Medal may be awarded posthumously. To make a nomination for either the Presidential Medal of Freedom or the Presidential Citizens Medal, a letter detailing the accomplishments of the nominee should be sent to the following address:

Executive Office of the President  
The White House  
ATTN: Executive Clerk's Office  
Washington, DC 20502  
Tel: (202) 456-2226; Fax: (202) 456-2569  
[<http://www.whitehouse.gov>]

**Global War on Terrorism Medals.** In Executive Order 13289 of March 12, 2003, President George W. Bush established two military medals for service in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). Specific eligibility for the medals will be established by DOD award policy. Future authorization for these medals will be considered by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff if the war expands.

- The **GWOT Expeditionary Medal** will recognize servicemen who participated on or after September 11, 2001, to combat terrorism and limited to those deployed are part of Operation Enduring Freedom.
- The **GWOT Service Medal** will recognize service in military operations to combat terrorism on or after September 11, 2001, and is limited to Operation Noble Eagle and to those service members who provide support to Operation Enduring Freedom from outside the area of eligibility designated for the GWOT expeditionary medal.

Copy of E.O. 13289 from the White House website at  
[<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030312-6.html>].

DOD Press release with links to photos of these two medals at  
[[http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Mar2003/b03152003\\_bt121-03.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Mar2003/b03152003_bt121-03.html)].

**Additional Awards and Medals.** Other awards presented by the President include are as follows:

- Enrico Fermi Award recognizing contributions in the field of nuclear energy (Department of Energy);
- “E” and “E Star” Awards recognizing contributions to export expansion efforts (Department of Commerce);
- Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award recognizing organizations for their achievements in quality and business performance (National Institute of Standards and Technology);
- Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (National Science Foundation);
- Presidential Rank Award and President’s Award for Distinguished Federal Civilian Service (Office of Personnel Management); and
- President’s Environmental Youth Award (Environmental Protection Agency).

In addition, special awards may be established to grant presidential recognition to persons or organizations for whom other categories of awards are not appropriate. For additional information, see *Awards, Honors, and Prizes* (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale Group. Annual) under “Executive Office of the President.”

Numerous other awards are authorized and may be presented by the President. Major medals are summarized in **Table 1**.

**Table 1. Presidential Medals**

Award or Medal	Contact Information	Purpose
Congressional Space Medal of Honor (P.L. 91-76)	Administrator of NASA NASA Headquarters 300 E St. S.W. Washington, DC 20546-0001 (202) 358-0000; Fax (202) 358-3251 E-mail: info-center@hq.nasa.gov [http://www.nasa.gov]	Awarded to astronauts whose particular efforts and contributions to the welfare of the nation and mankind have been exceptionally meritorious. Recommendations are made by the administrator of NASA to the President, who makes the award.
National Medal of Science (P.L. 86-209)	National Medal of Science Committee National Science Foundation 4201 Wilson Boulevard, Room 1225 Arlington, VA 22230 (703) 292-8070 [http://www.nsf.gov]	Awarded to individuals whose accumulated work has had a particularly significant impact on the present state of the physical, biological, mathematical, engineering, or social and behavioral sciences or that is deemed likely to strongly influence the future development of scientific thought.
National Medal of Technology (P.L. 96-480)	National Medal of Technology Technology Administration Room 4226 U.S. Department of Commerce 1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W. Washington, DC 20230 (202) 482-5572 E-mail: NMT@ta.doc.gov [http://www.ta.doc.gov/Medal/default.htm]	Awarded to individuals, teams, or companies for accomplishments in the innovation, development, commercialization, and management of technology, as evidenced by the establishment of new or significantly improved products, processes, or services.
National Security Medal (E.O. 10431)	National Security Council Old Executive Office Building Washington, DC 20506 (202) 456-1414 [http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc]	Recognizes exceptionally meritorious service performed in a position of high responsibility or an act of valor requiring personal courage of a high degree and complete disregard of personal safety.
Presidential Medal of Valor for Public Safety Officers (E.O. 13161)	U.S. Department of Justice 950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. Washington, DC 20530-0001 (202) 514-2000 [http://www.usdoj.gov]	Awarded to public safety officers judged to have shown extraordinary valor above and beyond the call of duty in the exercise of their official duties.
Young American Medal for Bravery (P.L. 81-638)	Young American Medals Committee Office of Justice Programs U.S. Department of Justice Washington, DC 20531 (202) 307-0781 [http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov:80/obms/young.htm]	Recognizes individuals exhibiting exceptional courage, extraordinary decision making, presence of mind, and unusual swiftness of action, regardless of their own personal safety, to save a person whose life was in actual imminent danger.
Young American Medal for Service (P.L. 81-638)		Recognizes individuals who have achieved outstanding or unusual recognition for character and service.

**Sources:** Congressional liaison offices of various agencies and the Internet.