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## Quarter and Half Dollar Coins: History and Current Status

The Secretary of the Treasury, through the U.S. Mint, is statutorily authorized to issue specific denominations of circulating coins (31 U.S.C. §5112). Currently, the United States has six circulating coins—dollar, half dollar, quarter dollar, dime, nickel, and penny. All coinage is also required to have certain design elements, including specific words such as “Liberty,” or “E Pluribus Unum.” Since 1930, the Mint has redesigned the quarter dollar four times (1932, 1976, 1997, and 2008), while the half dollar was last redesigned in 1964. In the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress (2019-2020), the Circulating Collectable Coin Redesign Act (P.L. 116-330) was enacted to authorize the further redesign of the quarter and half dollar coins issued between 2022 and 2030.

### Quarter Dollar Designs

The first quarters were issued in 1796 and depicted Lady Liberty on the (front) obverse and an eagle on the (back) reverse. Since then, the quarter dollar has been redesigned four times: in 1932 to place President Washington on the obverse, in 1976 for the Bicentennial of the United States, in 1997 when the 50-state quarter program was authorized, and in 2008 when the America the Beautiful program was authorized.

### Washington Quarter

In March 1931, President Herbert Hoover signed a law (46 Stat. 1523) to change the design of the quarter dollar coin to commemorate “the two hundredth anniversary of the birth of George Washington.” The law required a portrait of George Washington on the obverse and “appropriate devices on the reverse.” The finished coin (as seen in **Figure 1**) had a “standard eagle” design on the reverse.

**Figure 1. George Washington Quarter, 1932-1998**



**Source:** U.S. Mint, “The History of U.S. Circulating Coins,” at <https://www.usmint.gov/learn/history/us-circulating-coins>.

**Notes:** The reverse of the Washington Quarter was redesigned for the American Bicentennial in 1976. See **Figure 2**.

### Bicentennial Quarter

In October 1973, a law (P.L. 93-127) to redesign the quarter, half dollar, and dollar’s reverse to celebrate the bicentennial of American independence was enacted. The

law required that the coins have two dates—1776 and 1976—and should “bear a design determined by the Secretary [of the Treasury] to be emblematic of the Bicentennial.” **Figure 2** shows the Bicentennial Quarter and Half Dollar.

**Figure 2. Bicentennial Quarter and Half Dollar, 1976**



**Source:** U.S. Mint, “1976 Bicentennial Coins,” at <https://www.usmint.gov/learn/kids/library/bicentennial-coins>.

### 50 State Quarters

In December 1997, the 50 States Commemorative Coin Program Act was enacted (P.L. 105-124). The law mandated changes to the quarter dollar to honor each state. The 50 state quarters were first issued in 1999 in the order that the states ratified the Constitution or were admitted to the Union, starting with Delaware.

“This [50 State quarters] bill will reinvigorate our circulating coinage in a responsible, affordable way, serving the best interests of the general public, the national economy and the coin collecting community.... It will be educational and fun, will promote pride among the States and it will be a winner financially for the Government.”

—Rep. Mike Castle, *Congressional Record*, November 12, 1997

As initially enacted, the 50 state quarter program did not include the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, or the

territories. On December 26, 2007, the quarter dollar program was amended to include the District of Columbia and the territories (P.L. 110-161). These quarters were issued after the 50 states, beginning in 2009.

### America the Beautiful Quarters

In 2008, legislation was enacted to redesign the reverse of the quarter to honor national parks and historic sites in each state, territory, and the District of Columbia. The America the Beautiful quarters were first issued in 2010. Five national parks or historic sites were featured each year. The program ends in 2021. Quarters were issued in the order that the national park or historic site was created. **Figure 3** shows the last America the Beautiful quarter, the 2021 Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site (AL) quarter.

**Figure 3. 2021 Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site (AL) Quarter**



**Source:** U.S. Mint, "Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site Quarter," at <https://www.usmint.gov/coins/coin-medal-programs/america-the-beautiful-quarters/tuskegee-airmen-national-historic-site>.

### Washington Crossing the Delaware Quarter

When the America the Beautiful quarter program ends in 2021, the quarter dollar will feature George Washington on the obverse and a new image of General Washington Crossing the Delaware River prior to the Battle of Trenton on the reverse. **Figure 4** shows the Washington Crossing the Delaware quarter dollar that will be issued beginning in 2021 and during any period when Congress does not mandate an alternative design.

**Figure 4. Washington Crossing the Delaware Quarter**



**Source:** U.S. Mint, "General George Washington Crossing the Delaware Quarter," at <https://www.usmint.gov/coins/coin-medal-programs/circulating-coins/general-george-washington-crossing-the-delaware-quarter>.

### Circulating Collectible Coin Redesign Act of 2020

The Circulating Collectible Coin Redesign Act of 2020 (P.L. 116-330) authorizes the redesign of the quarter dollar's reverse three times between 2022 and 2030. They are:

- Between 2022 and 2025, to feature prominent American women in areas "including but not limited to suffrage, civil rights, abolition, government, humanities, science, space, and arts, and should honor women from ethnically, racially, and geographically diverse backgrounds." Each design will feature a single woman, with five women celebrated each year [§2]
- In 2026 to celebrate the Semiquincentennial (250<sup>th</sup> anniversary) of the United States, with up to five different designs. At least one must be "emblematic of a woman's or women's contribution to the birth of the Nation or the Declaration of Independence or any other monumental moments" in American history [§3]
- Between 2027 and 2030, to feature images "emblematic of sports played by American youth." Each will feature a single sport, with up to five sports celebrated each year [§4]

### Design of the Half Dollar

The half dollar coin was initially authorized in 1792. Since 1964, President John F. Kennedy has appeared on the obverse and an eagle on the reverse (except for a change to the reverse for the Bicentennial). **Figure 5** shows the current design of the Kennedy Half Dollar.

**Figure 5. Kennedy Half Dollar, 1964 to Present**



**Source:** U.S. Mint, "Half Dollar," at <https://www.usmint.gov/coins/coin-medal-programs/circulating-coins/half-dollar>.

The Circulating Collectible Coin Redesign Act of 2020 authorizes the half dollar's redesign between 2027 and 2030 to honor Paralympic sports with images on the reverse "emblematic of a sport tailored to athletes with a range of disabilities, including physical impairment, vision impairment and intellectual impairment."

For more information on circulating coins, see CRS In Focus IF10533, *Congressional Involvement in the Design of Circulating Coins*, by Jacob R. Straus.

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