

Sep 21, 2011 - Introduced in House. This is the original text of the bill as it was written by its sponsor and submitted to the House for consideration. This is the latest version of the bill currently available on GovTrack.



HR 3001 IH

112th CONGRESS
1st Session
H. R. 3001

To award a Congressional Gold Medal to Raoul Wallenberg, in recognition of his achievements and heroic actions during the Holocaust.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

September 21, 2011

Mr. MEEKS (for himself, Mr. SHERMAN, Mr. BERMAN, Ms. HAYWORTH, and Mr. GRIMM) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Financial Services

A BILL

To award a Congressional Gold Medal to Raoul Wallenberg, in recognition of his achievements and heroic actions during the Holocaust.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the 'Raoul Wallenberg Centennial Celebration Act'.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

The Congress finds as follows:

- (1) Raoul Wallenberg was born in Europe on August 4, 1912, to Swedish Christian parents.
- (2) In 1935, he graduated from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, completing a five-year program in three-and-a-half years.
- (3) In a letter to his grandfather, Wallenberg wrote of his time in America: 'I feel so at home in my little Ann Arbor that I'm beginning to sink down roots here and have a hard time imagining my leaving it. . . . Every now and then I feel strange when I think about how tiny my own country is and how large and wonderful America is.'
- (4) Raoul returned to Sweden, where he began a career as a businessman, and afterwards, a Swedish diplomat.
- (5) In 1936, Raoul's grandfather arranged a position for him at the Holland Bank in Haifa, Palestine. There Raoul began to meet young Jews who had already been forced to flee from Nazi persecution in Germany. Their stories affected him deeply.
- (6) He was greatly troubled by the fate of Jews in Europe, confiding to actress Viveca Lindfors the horrific plight of Jews under Nazi Europe.
- (7) Under the direction of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the War Refugee Board was established in January 1944 to aid civilians that fell victim to the Nazi and Axis powers in Europe.
- (8) One of War Refugee Board's top priorities was protection of the 750,000 Hungarian Jews still alive.
- (9) It was decided that Raoul Wallenberg, aged 31 at the time, would be most effective in protecting Jews and victims of the Nazis in Hungary under the War Refugee Board. He was recruited by Iver Olsen, an agent for the Office of Strategic Services and sent to Budapest, Hungary, under his official profession as a Swedish diplomat. He was instructed to use passports and other creative means to save as many lives as possible.
- (10) Wallenberg created a new Swedish passport, the Schutzpass, which looked more imposing and official than the actual Swedish passport. He reportedly put up huge place cards of it throughout Budapest to make the Nazis familiar with it. He unilaterally announced that it granted the holder immunity from the death camps. The Schutzpasses alone are credited with saving 20,000 Jewish lives.

(11) In one example of his heroism, Wallenberg was told of a Nazi plot to round up several thousand Jewish women and acted swiftly to save them. Former Wallenberg staffer, Agnes Adachi, recalls the time when she and other staff, spent the whole night making around 2,000 Schutzpasses before 6 a.m. They were all completed and personally delivered to the women in time to save their lives.

(12) Using the money the United States put into the War Refugee Board, Wallenberg was able to purchase about thirty buildings, which he used as hospitals, schools, soup kitchens, and safe houses for over 8,000 children whose parents have already been deported or killed.

(13) Tommy Lapid, a young boy who was staying with his mother in a Swedish safe house (his father was already dead), gave an eyewitness account of how his family was helped by Wallenberg and the War Refugee Board: 'One morning, a group of Hungarian Fascists came into the house and said that all the able-bodied women must go with them. We knew what this meant. My mother kissed me and I cried and she cried. We knew we were parting forever and she left me there, an orphan to all intents and purposes. Then two or three hours later, to my amazement, my mother returned with the other women. It seemed like a mirage, a miracle. My mother was there--she was alive and she was hugging me and kissing me, and she said one word: Wallenberg.'

(14) Even as the war was coming to a close, Wallenberg remained vigilant and attentive to the people under his care. Adolf Eichmann, the SS colonel charged with the extermination of Jews in Eastern Europe, was determined to exterminate the 70,000 Jews kept as prisoners in a guarded ghetto in Budapest. As soon as Wallenberg heard of the plot, he sent Pal Szalay, an Arrow-Crossman senior official, who defected and turned to Wallenberg. Szalay was sent to speak to General Schmidhuber, who was ordered to spearhead the ghetto extermination in Budapest. Szalay informed Schmidhuber that, seeing as the war was coming to an end, if the planned massacre took place, Wallenberg would see to it personally that Schmidhuber would be prosecuted as a war criminal and hanged. The plans were ultimately abandoned and considered Wallenberg's last big victory.

(15) Of the 120,000 Hungarian Jews that survived, Raoul Wallenberg, acting under the War Refugee Board, is credited with saving an estimated 100,000 of them in a six-month period.

(16) Raoul Wallenberg's fate remains a mystery. In January 13, 1945, he contacted the Russians in an effort to secure food for the Jews under his protection--as he was still working hard to protect them.

(17) In 1981, President Ronald Reagan made Raoul Wallenberg an honorary citizen of the United States, an honor only previously extended to Winston Churchill.

(18) These findings show that Raoul Wallenberg showed exceptional heroism and bravery with his actions during the holocaust. Working with the War Refugee Board, a United State's agency, he was able to save about 100,000 Hungarian Jews, many of which were later able to immigrate to the United States.

(19) Indeed, hundreds of thousands of American Jews can directly or indirectly attribute their own lives to Raoul Wallenberg's actions during World War II. Many of the people Wallenberg saved have been influential citizens contributing to American institutions and culture, including Congressman Tom Lantos (February 1, 1928-February 11, 2008), Annette Lantos, and the Liska Rebbe, Rabbi Yoizef (Joseph) Friedlander, who carried forth the Liska Hassidic dynasty from Hungary to the United States after being saved by Raoul Wallenberg.

(20) His actions and character make him an excellent contender for a Congressional Gold Medal in time for the centennial of his birth, to celebrate his achievements and humanitarian accomplishments.