

WASHINGTON (June 27) – Congressman Spencer Bachus (AL-6) today commended Reverend William Greason of Birmingham, who was one of the Montford Point Marines honored during a Congressional Gold Medal presentation at the U.S. Capitol.

The Montford Point Marines, the first African-American Marines, were recognized with the nation’s highest civilian honor for serving their country with valor during World War II and subsequent assignments and for their historic role in helping to integrate the U.S. military and American society. Reverend Greason participated in the invasion of Iwo Jima and served during the Korean War.

“It is a privilege to be able to pay this long overdue tribute to a courageous group of patriotic veterans at the U.S. Capitol. The awarding of the Congressional Gold Medal will help ensure that the proud legacy of the Montford Point Marines is permanently remembered in both military history and the history of the integration of American society. Reverend Greason himself stands as a source of inspiration to all of us by virtue of his military service, baseball achievements, and faithful ministry to the people of Birmingham,” said Congressman Bachus after attending the ceremony.

Congressman Bachus and Congresswoman Terri Sewell (AL-7), in conjunction with Friends of Rickwood Field, organized a local recognition program for Reverend Greason as part of the 2012 Rickwood Classic in Birmingham on May 30.

A Negro League baseball legend, Reverend Greason pitched at Rickwood Field as a Birmingham Black Baron and was one of the first African-Americans to play for the St. Louis Cardinals. As a spiritual leader in Birmingham, he has served as pastor of Bethel Baptist Church.

BACKGROUND ON CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL

The Congressional Gold Medal recognizes the Montford Point Marines for their exceptional service and achievements. As the first African-American Marines, the nearly 20,000 recruits trained at Camp Montford Point in North Carolina between 1942 and 1949 overcame

discrimination and segregation to perform distinguished military service for the country during World War II and subsequent conflicts.

The requirements for the awarding of Congressional Gold Medals are set in statute by the rules of the Financial Services Committee, which Congressman Bachus chairs, and the House. The legislation was introduced by Rep. Corrine Brown of Florida and forwarded to the House floor with Chairman Bachus' support. It received unanimous approval in the House and Senate and was signed into law by President Obama on November 23, 2011.

Upon the signing of the legislation, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General James F. Amos, said of the Montford Point Marines, "Their story is one of triumph over adversity. Their legacy of courage and perseverance is an inspiration to all Marines."

During World War II, Reverend Greason participated in the invasion of Iwo Jima as a member of the 34th Marine Depot Company. His awards include a battle star, the Japan Occupation Medal and Presidential Unit Citation with one Bronze Star. He answered the call of duty a second time with service during the Korean War.