

116TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 8730

To award a Congressional Gold Medal to Reverend James Morris Lawson, Jr., in recognition of his contributions to the United States through the promotion of nonviolence during the Civil Rights movement and beyond.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

NOVEMBER 5, 2020

Mr. KHANNA (for himself, Mr. COHEN, Mr. CLYBURN, Ms. BASS, Mr. CLEAVER, and Mr. RIGGLEMAN) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Financial Services

A BILL

To award a Congressional Gold Medal to Reverend James Morris Lawson, Jr., in recognition of his contributions to the United States through the promotion of nonviolence during the Civil Rights movement and beyond.

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 “Reverend James
5 Lawson, Jr. Congressional Gold Medal Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

1 (1) Reverend James Morris Lawson, Jr. (“Rev.
2 Lawson”) was born in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, on
3 September 22, 1928, to Reverend James Morris
4 Lawson, Sr. and Philane May Cover.

5 (2) Rev. Lawson received his local preacher’s li-
6 cense in 1947, the same year he graduated from
7 high school.

8 (3) While attending Baldwin-Wallace College,
9 Rev. Lawson joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation,
10 the oldest pacifist organization in the United States
11 and an advocate of nonviolent resistance to racism,
12 as well as the Congress of Racial Equality, where he
13 was exposed to the nonviolent teachings of world-re-
14 nowned civil rights and spiritual leader Mohandas K.
15 Gandhi (“Gandhi”).

16 (4) From 1953 to 1956, Rev. Lawson served as
17 a Methodist missionary at Hislop College in Nagpur,
18 India, where he continued his studies of satyagraha,
19 Gandhi’s philosophy of nonviolent resistance, and
20 met with associates and fellow students of Gandhi.

21 (5) Rev. Lawson was instrumental in bringing
22 the message of Gandhi to the United States.

23 (6) Rev. Lawson viewed segregation in the
24 United States as “much like the ‘untouchables’ of
25 India” and was inspired by the view of Gandhi that

1 it could be through African Americans that “the un-
2 adulterated message of nonviolence will be delivered
3 to the world.”.

4 (7) In 1956, Rev. Lawson enrolled in the
5 Oberlin School of Theology in Ohio, where he first
6 met Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (“Dr. King”),
7 who urged Rev. Lawson to move to the South to
8 spread his teachings on nonviolence, saying “Don’t
9 wait! Come now! You’re badly needed. We don’t have
10 anyone like you!”.

11 (8) In 1957, Rev. Lawson answered the call of
12 Dr. King, moving to Nashville, Tennessee, and en-
13 rolling at Vanderbilt Divinity School as the second
14 African-American student in its history.

15 (9) Rev. Lawson opened a Fellowship of Rec-
16 onciliation field office, became the southern secretary
17 for the organization, and held seminars to train vol-
18 unteers in Gandhian tactics of nonviolent direct ac-
19 tion.

20 (10) Rev. Lawson was an advisor for the Little
21 Rock Nine, teaching the students, in the living room
22 of Arkansas NAACP Chair Daisy Bates, how to re-
23 sist their opponents using the “superior weapons”
24 offered by nonviolence.

1 (11) Rev. Lawson led the Nashville sit-in cam-
2 paign of 1960 that successfully challenged “Jim
3 Crow” and trained a new generation of civil rights
4 activists.

5 (12) In 1960, the Southern Christian Leader-
6 ship Conference, led by Ella Baker, organized the
7 Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, with
8 Rev. Lawson writing the statement of purpose for
9 the organization and delivering the keynote speech
10 at the organization’s founding meeting in April of
11 that year.

12 (13) Rev. Lawson, and the activists he trained,
13 organized many famous campaigns, including the
14 Freedom Rides, Freedom Schools, 1963 March on
15 Washington, Mississippi Freedom Summer, Mis-
16 sissippi Freedom Democratic Party, 1963 Bir-
17 mingham Children’s Crusade, 1965 Selma Voting
18 Rights Movement, and 1966 Chicago Open Housing
19 Movement.

20 (14) In 1968, Rev. Lawson chaired the strike
21 committee for the Memphis Sanitation Workers, a
22 campaign that advanced the slogan “I Am A Man”
23 and was the first successful effort to organize Afri-
24 can-American municipal workers in the South.

1 (15) Dr. King lauded Rev. Lawson as the
2 “leading theorist and strategist of nonviolence in the
3 world” and civil rights leader Diane Nash stated
4 that Rev. Lawson’s “impact was fundamental and
5 tremendous. I think that he, more than anyone else
6 really, is why the civil rights movement was non-
7 violent”.

8 (16) In 1974, Rev. Lawson became pastor of
9 Holman United Methodist Church in Los Angeles,
10 where he continued his nonviolent advocacy for ra-
11 cial equality and social justice, including through
12 Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice, the
13 Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the
14 American Civil Liberties Union, Interfaith Commu-
15 nities United for Peace and Justice, the National
16 Committee for Worker Justice, and many others.

17 (17) Rev. Lawson received dozens of awards,
18 honorary degrees, and lectureships, including the
19 National Civil Rights Museum Freedom Award,
20 Vanderbilt University’s Walter R. Murray Distin-
21 guished Alumnus Award, Harvard University’s
22 Henry Luce Lectureship, and recognition for his
23 leadership and lifetime achievements from the Con-
24 gressional Black Caucus Foundation and the Amer-
25 ican Civil Liberties Union.

1 (18) Rev. Lawson has played an invaluable role
2 in the progress of the United States due to his tire-
3 less work to create what Dr. King called a “beloved
4 community” where people treat each other with re-
5 spect and dignity and end all forms of violence in
6 favor of a politics of love.

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

8 (a) PRESENTATION AUTHORIZED.—The Speaker of
9 the House of Representatives and the President pro tem-
10 pore of the Senate shall make appropriate arrangements
11 for the presentation, on behalf of Congress, of a gold
12 medal of appropriate design to Reverend James Morris
13 Lawson, Jr., in recognition of his contributions to the
14 United States.

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

21 **SEC. 4. DUPLICATE MEDALS.**

22 The Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in
23 bronze of the gold medal struck pursuant to section 3
24 under such regulations as the Secretary may prescribe, at
25 a price sufficient to cover the cost thereof, including labor,

1 materials, dies, use of machinery, overhead expenses, and
2 the cost of the gold medal.

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

4 (a) NATIONAL MEDALS.—The medals struck pursu-
5 ant to this Act are national medals for purposes of chapter
6 51 of title 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.

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