

117TH CONGRESS  
2D SESSION

# H. R. 7091

To award posthumously a Congressional Gold Medal to Henrietta Lacks, in recognition of her immortal cells which have made invaluable contributions to global health, scientific research, our quality of life, and patients' rights.

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## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MARCH 15, 2022

Mr. MFUME (for himself, Ms. ADAMS, Ms. WILLIAMS of Georgia, Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN, Ms. NORTON, Ms. MOORE of Wisconsin, Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia, Mr. SOTO, Mr. MEUSER, Mr. TRONE, Mr. SARBANES, Mr. BROWN of Maryland, and Ms. KELLY of Illinois) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Financial Services, and in addition to the Committee on House Administration, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

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## A BILL

To award posthumously a Congressional Gold Medal to Henrietta Lacks, in recognition of her immortal cells which have made invaluable contributions to global health, scientific research, our quality of life, and patients' rights.

1       *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2       *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

1 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

2       This Act may be cited as the “Henrietta Lacks Con-  
3 gressional Gold Medal Act”.

4 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

5       Congress finds the following:

6           (1) Henrietta Lacks, an African-American  
7 woman born on August 1, 1920, in Roanoke, Vir-  
8 ginia, was raised by her grandfather on a tobacco  
9 farm in Clover, Virginia.

10          (2) Henrietta Lacks, her husband, and family  
11 moved to Baltimore, Maryland in 1941 seeking eco-  
12 nomic opportunity at the Bethlehem Steel Plant.

13          (3) In 1951, Henrietta Lacks sought treatment  
14 for her continuous vaginal bleeding from The Johns  
15 Hopkins Hospital, which was one of the few hos-  
16 pitals willing to treat African Americans at that  
17 time. Gynecologists discovered a large, malignant  
18 tumor on her cervix.

19          (4) Unbeknownst to Henrietta Lacks or her  
20 family, medical researchers took samples of Hen-  
21 rietta Lacks’ tumor during her treatment without  
22 her consent. Henrietta Lacks’ cells, now known as  
23 “HeLa Cells”, doubled every 20 to 24 hours whereas  
24 other human cells died in the same time period. The  
25 HeLa Cells are the first known immortal line of  
26 human cells in history.

1           (5) On October 4, 1951, 31-year-old Henrietta  
2       Lacks died of an aggressive cervical cancer eight  
3       months after her cancer diagnosis, leaving behind  
4       her husband and 5 children.

5           (6) The HeLa immortal cell line is the oldest  
6       and most used human cell line used in scientific re-  
7       search. Henrietta Lacks' immortal cells have been  
8       commercialized and distributed worldwide to re-  
9       searchers, resulting in groundbreaking advancements  
10      in modern science and technology.

11          (7) Henrietta Lacks' prolific cells continue to  
12      replicate to this day and contribute to remarkable  
13      advances in medicine, including the development of  
14      the polio vaccine and drugs used to treat cancer,  
15      HIV/AIDS, hemophilia, leukemia, and Parkinson's  
16      disease. HeLa cells have been used in research that  
17      has contributed to our understanding of the effects  
18      of radiation and zero gravity on human cells, and  
19      have informed research on chromosomal conditions,  
20      cancer, gene mapping, and precision medicine.

21          (8) The use of HeLa cells as the foundation for  
22      biomedical research has led to several Nobel Prize  
23      winning discoveries. The National Institute of  
24      Health located over 110,000 publications that cited  
25      the use of HeLa cells between 1953 to 2018. These

1 advances were made possible by Henrietta Lacks’  
2 cells, yet the revenues they generated were not  
3 known to her family for more than twenty years.

4 (9) Henrietta Lacks is a linchpin to modern  
5 bioethics policies and informed consent laws that  
6 benefit patients nationwide by building patient trust  
7 and protecting research participants.

8 (10) Henrietta Lacks’ legacy has been recog-  
9 nized around the world through memorials, con-  
10 ferences, museum exhibitions, libraries, and print  
11 and visual media for changing the face of medical  
12 science.

13 **SEC. 3. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL.**

14 (a) PRESENTATION AUTHORIZED.—The Speaker of  
15 the House of Representatives and the President pro tem-  
16 pore of the Senate shall make appropriate arrangements  
17 for the posthumous presentation, on behalf of Congress,  
18 of a gold medal of appropriate design in commemoration  
19 of Henrietta Lacks, in recognition of her immortal cells  
20 which have made invaluable contributions to global health,  
21 scientific research, our quality of life, and patients’ rights.

22 (b) DESIGN AND STRIKING.—For the purposes of the  
23 presentation referred to in subsection (a), the Secretary  
24 of the Treasury (hereafter in this Act referred to as the  
25 “Secretary”) shall strike a gold medal with suitable em-

1 blem, devices, and inscriptions, to be determined by the  
2 Secretary.

3 (c) SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.—

4 (1) IN GENERAL.—Following the award of the  
5 gold medal under subsection (a), the gold medal  
6 shall be given to the Smithsonian Institution, where  
7 it shall be available for display as appropriate and  
8 made available for research.

9 (2) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of  
10 Congress that the Smithsonian Institution should  
11 make the gold medal received under paragraph (1)  
12 available for display elsewhere, particularly at other  
13 appropriate locations associated with Henrietta  
14 Lacks.

15 **SEC. 4. DUPLICATE MEDALS.**

16 The Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in  
17 bronze of the gold medal struck pursuant to section 3, at  
18 a price sufficient to cover the cost thereof, including labor,  
19 materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses.

20 **SEC. 5. STATUS OF MEDALS.**

21 (a) NATIONAL MEDALS.—The medals struck pursu-  
22 ant to this Act are national medals for purposes of chapter  
23 51 of title 31, United States Code.

1       (b) NUMISMATIC ITEMS.—For purposes of section  
2 5134 of title 31, United States Code, all medals struck  
3 under this Act shall be considered to be numismatic items.

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