

117TH CONGRESS  
2D SESSION

# H. R. 8691

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.

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## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

AUGUST 9, 2022

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

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## 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. The design shall bear an image of, and inscription  
21          of the name of, the Reverend James Morris Lawson, Jr.

22   **SEC. 4. DUPLICATE MEDALS.**

23          The Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in  
24          bronze of the gold medal struck pursuant to section 3, at

1 a price sufficient to cover the cost thereof, including labor,  
2 materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses.

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.

11 **SEC. 6. AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS; PROCEEDS OF**  
12 **SALE.**

13 (a) AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS.—There is  
14 authorized to be charged against the United States Mint  
15 Public Enterprise Fund such amounts as may be nec-  
16 essary to pay for the costs of the medals struck under  
17 this Act.

18 (b) PROCEEDS OF SALE.—Amounts received from the  
19 sale of duplicate bronze medals authorized under section  
20 4 shall be deposited into the United States Mint Public  
21 Enterprise Fund.

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