

118TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 4122

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.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JUNE 14, 2023

Mr. MFUME (for himself, Ms. NORTON, Ms. KELLY of Illinois, Mr. ALLRED, Ms. BROWN, Mrs. FOUSHEE, Ms. WILSON of Florida, and Ms. LEE of California) 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

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,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

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

1 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

2 Congress finds the following:

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

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

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

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

24 (5) On October 4, 1951, 31-year-old Henrietta
25 Lacks died of an aggressive cervical cancer eight

1 months after her cancer diagnosis, leaving behind
2 her husband and 5 children.

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

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

19 (8) The use of HeLa cells as the foundation for
20 biomedical research has led to several Nobel Prize
21 winning discoveries. The National Institute of
22 Health located over 110,000 publications that cited
23 the use of HeLa cells between 1953 to 2018. These
24 advances were made possible by Henrietta Lacks'

1 cells, yet the revenues they generated were not
2 known to her family for more than twenty years.

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

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

12 **SEC. 3. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL.**

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

21 (b) DESIGN AND STRIKING.—For the purposes of the
22 presentation referred to in subsection (a), the Secretary
23 of the Treasury (hereafter in this Act referred to as the
24 "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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