

119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 1893

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 SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MAY 22, 2025

Mr. VAN HOLLEN (for himself and Ms. ALSOBROOKS) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs

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”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

17 (8) The use of HeLa cells as the foundation for
18 biomedical research has led to several Nobel Prize
19 winning discoveries. The National Institute of
20 Health located over 110,000 publications that cited
21 the use of HeLa cells between 1953 to 2018. These
22 advances were made possible by Henrietta Lacks'
23 cells, yet the revenues they generated were not
24 known to her family for more than twenty years.

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

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

10 **SEC. 3. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL.**

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

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

25 (c) SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.—

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

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

12 **SEC. 4. DUPLICATE MEDALS.**

13 The Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in
14 bronze of the gold medal struck under section 3, at a price
15 sufficient to cover the costs of the medals, including labor,
16 materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses.

17 **SEC. 5. STATUS OF MEDALS.**

18 (a) NATIONAL MEDALS.—The medals struck pursu-
19 ant to this Act are national medals for purposes of chapter
20 51 of title 31, United States Code.

21 (b) NUMISMATIC ITEMS.—For purposes of section
22 5134 of title 31, United States Code, all medals struck
23 under this Act shall be considered to be numismatic items.

1 **SEC. 6. AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS; PROCEEDS OF**
2 **SALE.**

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

8 (b) PROCEEDS OF SALE.—Amounts received from the
9 sale of duplicate bronze medals authorized under section
10 4 shall be deposited into the United States Mint Public
11 Enterprise Fund.

