

118TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 8231

To award a congressional gold medal to James Earl Jones, an American icon, in recognition of a remarkable life in reshaping perceptions, dismantling racial barriers, and advocating for equal opportunities for people of all backgrounds in film and theatre.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MAY 2, 2024

Mr. LAWLER (for himself, Mr. TORRES of New York, and Mr. MOLINARO) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Financial Services

A BILL

To award a congressional gold medal to James Earl Jones, an American icon, in recognition of a remarkable life in reshaping perceptions, dismantling racial barriers, and advocating for equal opportunities for people of all backgrounds in film and theatre.

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 “James Earl Jones Con-
5 gressional Gold Medal Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

1 (1) James Earl Jones, born on January 17,
2 1931, in Arkabutla Township, Mississippi, was
3 raised largely by his grandparents after his father
4 left. Following the family’s move to Michigan, he de-
5 veloped a serious stutter that led to him rarely
6 speaking.

7 (2) James Earl Jones started writing poetry
8 while still in school and used this to break free of
9 his stutter. Inspired by the grapefruit that the Fed-
10 eral Government gave to Mississippians during the
11 wartime shortage, Jones penned a poem titled “Ode
12 to Grapefruit”. Jones continued to write, play, and
13 compete and as a result, he was awarded a scholar-
14 ship to the University of Michigan and won a public
15 speaking competition.

16 (3) Jones enlisted in the Army in 1953 and re-
17 ported to Fort Benning, Georgia, for Ranger School
18 and the Officers Basic Course. He was commis-
19 sioned as a second lieutenant. Following his train-
20 ing, Jones was tasked with assisting in the establish-
21 ment of a cold weather training command at the
22 defunct Camp Hale in Colorado.

23 (4) Jones relocated to New York City and took
24 a job as a janitor to support himself while attending

1 the American Theatre Wing after receiving an hon-
2 orable discharge as a first lieutenant.

3 (5) Jones' Broadway debut was in 1957, where
4 he performed in several Shakespeare plays, including
5 Othello, Hamlet, Coriolanus, and King Lear. In
6 1963, Jones received his first major nomination, re-
7 ceiving a Primetime Emmy Awards nomination for
8 his role in "East Side/West Side".

9 (6) "Dr. Strangelove", directed by Stanley
10 Kubrick, was Jones' feature picture debut.

11 (7) Jones' performance in the play "The Great
12 White Hope", which was about the first Black
13 heavyweight boxing champion, earned him his first
14 Tony Award in 1969.

15 (8) Throughout his career, Jones has provided
16 the voices of well-known global characters, such as
17 Mufasa in the animated film "The Lion King" and
18 Darth Vader in the "Star Wars" series.

19 (9) Throughout his professional life, Jones has
20 been nominated for two Academy Awards, five Tony
21 Awards, eight Primetime Emmy Awards, three
22 Grammy Awards, and five Golden Globe Awards.

23 (10) Jones is one of the rare performers to
24 have received an EGOT (Emmy, Grammy, Oscar,
25 and Tony). Jones was honored with three Tony

1 Awards, an Honorary Academy Award, a Grammy
2 Award, and two Primetime Emmy Awards.

3 (11) In 1985, Jones was inducted into the
4 American Theater Hall of Fame.

5 (12) In 1992, President George H.W. Bush and
6 First Lady Barbara Bush presented Jones with the
7 National Medal of the Arts at the White House in
8 recognition of his career.

9 (13) In 2002, Jones was selected to be a recipi-
10 ent of the 2002 Kennedy Center Honors for his con-
11 tributions to the cultural life of the Nation at the
12 John F. Kennedy Center in Washington, DC.

13 (14) On May 12 2009, President and First
14 Lady Obama invited James Earl Jones to perform
15 Shakespeare’s “Othello” at the White House
16 Evening of Poetry, Music, and the Spoken Word.

17 (15) On September 12, 2022, the Cort Theatre,
18 a Broadway theater in the Theater District of Mid-
19 town Manhattan in New York City, was renamed the
20 James Earl Jones Theatre.

21 (16) James Earl Jones has been recognized for
22 his independence, activism, and groundbreaking
23 achievements and has been described as one of the
24 greatest actors in American history.

1 (17) James Earl Jones’ career showcases talent
2 and resilience in an industry that historically faced
3 challenges related to representation.

4 **SEC. 3. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL.**

5 (a) PRESENTATION AUTHORIZED.—The Speaker of
6 the House of Representatives and the President pro tem-
7 pore of the Senate shall make appropriate arrangements
8 for the presentation, on behalf of Congress, of a gold
9 medal of appropriate design to James Earl Jones, in rec-
10 ognition of his contribution to the United States and his
11 achievements of paving the way for inclusion and equal
12 opportunities for people of all backgrounds in film and
13 theatre.

14 (b) DESIGN AND STRIKING.—For purposes of the
15 presentation described in subsection (a), the Secretary of
16 the Treasury (referred to in this Act as the “Secretary”)
17 shall strike a gold medal with suitable emblems, devices,
18 and inscriptions to be determined by the Secretary. The
19 design shall bear an image of, and inscription of the name
20 of, James Earl Jones.

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 at
24 a price sufficient to cover the costs of the medals, includ-

1 ing labor, materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead
2 expenses.

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

4 (a) NATIONAL MEDALS.—Medals struck under this
5 Act are national medals for purposes of chapter 51 of title
6 31, United States Code.

7 (b) NUMISMATIC ITEMS.—For purposes of section
8 5134 and section 5136 of title 31, United States Code,
9 all medals struck under this Act shall be considered to
10 be numismatic 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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