

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 13, 2022

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We write to respectfully request that you posthumously award the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Rafer Lewis Johnson, who was a decorated athlete, actor, and public servant. We believe Mr. Johnson's life and legacy are fully deserving of this recognition and consistent with the medal's criteria of "especially meritorious contribution to the security or national interests of the United States, world peace, cultural or other significant public or private endeavors."

Rafer Johnson was born on August 18, 1934, in Hillsboro, Texas, and lived the first few years of his life in a segregated community in the Jim Crow South. When he was young, his family moved to Kingsburg, California, where they lived for a year in a railroad boxcar. Despite these challenges, Mr. Johnson excelled as a multi-sport athlete in football, basketball, baseball, and track and field at Kingsburg High School.

Mr. Johnson later attended the University of California, Los Angeles, where he would be elected student body president, the second Black UCLA student to do so. He continued to excel in athletics and participated in the decathlon event and on the men's basketball team under legendary coach John Wooden. He excelled at the decathlon, going on to win the Pan American Games in 1955 as a freshman in college and a silver medal at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. In 1960, Mr. Johnson was chosen to be the first Black captain of a U.S. Olympic team, carrying the American flag into Rome's Olympic stadium. He went on to win gold at the games, setting an Olympic record in the decathlon.

When he returned from the 1960 Olympics, Mr. Johnson began a prolific acting career, starring in films such as *The Sins of Rachel Cade*, *Wild in the Country*, and *Licence to Kill*. He also became involved in public service and activism. Throughout the 1960s, he worked with the State Department to visit other countries as a goodwill ambassador. He met Robert F. Kennedy after the 1960 Olympics and worked on his 1968 presidential campaign. During the assassination of Senator Kennedy, Mr. Johnson helped tackle the assassin, Sirhan Sirhan, and wrestled the gun from his hand. He would later serve as one of the pallbearers at Senator Kennedy's funeral.

Mr. Johnson worked closely with Eunice Kennedy Shriver to establish the Special Olympics in 1968 and promote athletic participation for people with intellectual and physical disabilities. He was also a founding member of the California Special Olympics, and later founded and chaired the Southern California Chapter of the Special Olympics. Throughout his life, he remained

dedicated to the mission and growth of the organization, serving as President of the Board of Directors of the California Special Olympics for nearly a decade.

Mr. Johnson also dedicated his time and resources to support numerous service organizations, including the March of Dimes, the Muscular Dystrophy Association, the American Red Cross, the National Amateur Sports Development Foundation, the San Fernando Valley Fair Housing Council, and the Voter Registration Project.

Due to his longstanding and selfless service to our country, he was chosen for the honor of lighting the Olympic torch at the 1984 Los Angeles Summer Olympics. He was also honored by being inducted into the California Hall of Fame, the National High School Hall of Fame, and the National Track and Field Hall of Fame.

Rafer Johnson passed away in his home on December 2, 2020, at the age of 86. He leaves behind an incredible legacy of excellence and service. He was not only one of the greatest athletes in American history, but a leader who broke racial barriers and worked towards ensuring the inclusion of all Americans, especially those with disabilities.

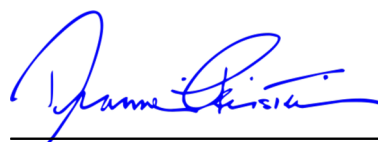
Mr. Johnson's compassion and dedication to serving others are exemplary reasons for why he deserves the honor of posthumously receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom. His legacy serves as a blueprint for all Americans on how to dedicate one's life to the service of others.

Thank you for your consideration of Mr. Rafer Lewis Johnson for the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Sincerely,



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Brad Sherman
Member of Congress



David G. Valadao
Member of Congress

Ted W. Lieu

Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress

Tony Cárdenas

Tony Cárdenas
Member of Congress

Nanette Diaz Barragán

Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress

Adam B. Schiff

Adam B. Schiff
Member of Congress

Jim Costa

Jim Costa
Member of Congress

Jimmy Gomez

Jimmy Gomez
Member of Congress

Judy Chu

Judy Chu
Member of Congress

Alan Lowenthal

Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress