

(Washington, D.C.) – The House of Representatives last night passed a bill introduced by U.S. Rep. Rush Holt (NJ-12) and Assistant Senate Majority Leader Dick Durbin (D-IL) to award a Congressional Gold Medal to Dr. Muhammad Yunus in recognition of his contributions to the fight against global poverty and to promote economic and social change. The Senate unanimously passed the bill last year. Dr. Yunus is recognized as developing the concept of microcredit, or the extension of very small loans to the poor. With just a few dollars in their pockets, the poor are able to become entrepreneurs, selling vegetables, clothing, hand-made goods, and other products in order to slowly generate and accumulate profits.

“Muhammad Yunus, widely known as the 'banker to the poor,' is one of the world's great humanitarians and an economic genius,” said Holt, who Friday joined Dr. Yunus for a talk at Lawrenceville School in New Jersey. “Over the last three decades, Dr. Yunus has made the elimination of poverty his life's work, and the concept of microcredit has been widely adopted as a means of combating poverty worldwide. Muhammad Yunus and those who have followed in his footsteps have made it possible for the working poor to transform themselves into an entrepreneurial middle class and for beggars to become business people. We honor his achievements and his extraordinary vision.” Video of Holt's remarks can be found [here](#) .

“Dr. Muhammad Yunus believes overcoming poverty is not just a gesture of charity; it is an act of justice,” Durbin said. “For more than thirty years, his theory of microenterprise has become a phenomenon – touching the lives of more than 100 million people around the world. It is hard to think of any single idea in our lifetime which has lifted so many people out of the deepest depths of poverty. He is truly deserving of the Congressional Gold Medal and I am honored to call him a friend.”

In 1974, as Bangladesh was struggling with a terrible famine, Dr. Yunus, a professor of economics, led his students out of the classroom and into a poor village nearby. There, they discovered that impoverished people could not get ahead because of the oppressive business practices of money-lenders who exploited their poverty and desperation. With just twenty-seven dollars of his own money, Professor Yunus liberated 42 victims of these unfair practices from their debt burdens.

From that first experience with the power of small amounts of money, Professor Yunus developed the concept of microcredit. The World Bank estimates that microfinance institutions now serve 160 million people in developing countries. Women, who make up 60 percent of the world's poorest citizens and disproportionately shoulder the burdens of poverty, receive over 95

percent of microloans. The funds allow them to increase their independence and improve the quality of life for their families. Children of borrowers are more likely to attend school and enjoy better nutrition.

In 2006, Dr. Yunus, along with the Grameen Bank microfinancing he created, received the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to promote economic and social opportunity.

“Even with all of these accomplishments derived from the leadership of Dr. Yunus, there is more to be done,” Holt added. “There are 2.6 billion people around the world who live on less than two dollars per day, and the poorest 1.4 billion live on less than \$1.25 per day. Microfinance still needs to take deeper root in Africa, where 75 percent of the population lives on less than \$2 per day. We must commit ourselves to addressing their needs, and microfinance can be a key component of that work.”

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