

House Honors Suu Kyi

The Associated Press
Monday, December 17, 2007; 9:19 PM

WASHINGTON -- The House voted Monday to bestow the Congressional Gold Medal, Congress' highest civilian honor, on Myanmar pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Supporters of the legislation, which passed 400-0, made clear the award was meant to send a message to the military leaders in Myanmar, or Burma, who have suppressed political freedoms in that Asian country the past two decades.

By honoring Suu Kyi, said Rep. Joseph Crowley, D-N.Y., "we will continue to pressure the junta to release her and bring freedom and democracy to the people of Burma."

Suu Kyi, 62, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991, has been detained for 12 of the past 18 years. Her National League for Democracy party won elections in 1990 but the military junta refused to cede power, placing her under house arrest.

In October, over Chinese objections, President Bush attended ceremonies in the Capitol to award the gold medal to the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan spiritual and human rights leader who lives in exile because of his opposition to the Chinese government's policies in Tibet.

Other non-American recipients include former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Pope John Paul II, South African political leader Nelson Mandela and Mother Teresa.

George Washington received the first Gold Medal, which originally was given to military heroes but was later expanded to include scientists, explorers, artists, athletes, humanitarians and others with notable achievements and contributions. More than 300 individuals and groups have received the award.

The Senate must also approve the legislation.

The bill is H.R. 4286.

On the Net:

Congress: <http://thomas.loc.gov/>