



GARY R. JONES, *PRESIDENT*      RAY CURRY, *SECRETARY-TREASURER*  
VICE-PRESIDENTS: TERRY DITTES • CINDY ESTRADA • RORY L. GAMBLE

August 8, 2019

Stamp Development  
Attn: Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee  
475 L'Enfant Plaza SW, Room 3300  
Washington, DC 20260-3501

RE:      Proposal for Walter Reuther 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Stamp

Dear Committee,

May 9, 2020, marks the 50th anniversary of Walter Reuther's untimely passing. Reuther was highly respected as a brilliant man and motivating speaker, who believed workers having a seat at the table to negotiate with their employer was for the betterment of mankind, not just the union. By the time Reuther and his wife May were tragically killed in a plane crash outside of Onaway, Michigan on May 9, 1970, he had been the president of the UAW for 24 years, and an early champion of civil rights and other social justice causes. In an unprecedented show of respect and solidarity, on May 12, the day of Walter and May's funeral, UAW members at over 300 plants across the United States and Canada turned off their machines and halted assembly for three minutes to honor their fallen leader. Reuther is quoted as saying, "There is no greater calling than to serve your fellow man. There is no greater contribution than to help the weak. There is no greater satisfaction than to have done it well." These words personify Walter Reuther's enduring and extraordinary contributions to American society. We are writing to propose that a commemorative stamp be released in Reuther's honor, in conjunction with the 50th anniversary of his passing.

Walter P. Reuther was president of the International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW) from 1946 until his death on May 9, 1970. Under his leadership, the UAW grew to over 1.5 million members, becoming one of the largest labor unions in the United States. He was the leading labor intellectual of his age, a champion of workplace democracy and civil rights, who used the collective bargaining process and labor's political influence to further the cause of social and economic justice for all Americans.

Reuther was born the son of Valentine Reuther and Anna Stocker in Wheeling, W.V., on Sept. 1, 1907, which happened to be Labor Day that year. He received an early education in union politics from his father. Fired for trying to organize a union as an apprentice tool-and-die maker, Reuther moved to Detroit in 1927, drawn by Ford Motor Company's promise of high wages and a shorter workweek.

In 1946, Reuther was elected International President of the UAW. Under his leadership, members of the UAW negotiated their fair share of the massive wealth they produced and restored dignity to the work they performed. In 1948, General Motors agreed to a historic contract tying wage gains to the general cost-of-living and productivity increases. Over the next two decades, Reuther led the union as they won model grievance procedures, health and safety provisions, pensions, health benefits, and more.

As a labor organizer in Detroit, Reuther set out to organize a local union on the city's west side. Within eight months, UAW Local 174, of which Reuther was president, represented 30,000 workers at 76 factories. He played a critical role in planning the successful 1937 General Motors sit-down strike in Flint, Michigan, then joined the effort to secure similar UAW recognition from Ford. Reuther's organizing at Ford brought him national attention during the "Battle of the Overpass" at Ford's River Rouge Plant, when press photographers captured him being beaten bloody by the Ford Service Department, a private security force of almost 2,000 men formed to combat union organizing.

Reuther's work, however, went well beyond contract negotiations and union organizing. He held the belief that the labor movement was a social movement, and that unions had the potential to improve the quality of life for all. Because of his political involvement, Reuther was considered by John F. Kennedy for Vice President in 1960. Reuther met weekly with President Lyndon Johnson throughout 1964–1965 to discuss legislative and political initiatives for eliminating poverty and racial injustice. Reuther was instrumental in spearheading the creation of the Peace Corps, marshaling support for the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Medicare and Medicaid, and the Fair Housing Act.

In 1940, in the midst of World War II, Reuther proposed the "500 Planes a Day" plan, because the United States production of fighter planes to help allies in their war against Hitler's aggression was slow, and inadequate. The US planned to construct new manufacturing plants to produce more planes, but it would have taken two years to begin production. Reuther's proposal was to transform the entire unused capacity of the auto industry into one huge plane production unit capable of turning out 500 Planes a Day. His proposal included the opportunity for more women to enter the workforce. After getting the support of workers, he publicly announced the "Reuther Plan: 500 Planes a Day," shortly before Christmas, 1940. Reuther met with President Roosevelt at the White House on January 2, 1941, to discuss the possibility of implementing his plan. Ultimately, most of Reuther's plan was accomplished and made way for more than 310,000 women to enter the U.S. aircraft industry, making up 65 percent of the industry's total workforce (compared to just 1 percent in the pre-war years). Reuther's plan was crucial to the war effort.

As president of the UAW, Reuther fought for civil rights protections that would benefit all Americans and he became involved in the civil rights movement early, providing resources to some of the most iconic moments of the era. The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. organized the Detroit "Walk to Freedom March", a precursor to the Washington, D.C. "March on Washington", from an office at the UAW's headquarters, Solidarity House, with space donated by Reuther. Reuther stood beside Dr. King when he delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech at the March on Washington and was one of only six speakers at the event. Reuther also played a critical role in desegregating the nation's bowling alleys, by filing a lawsuit against the American

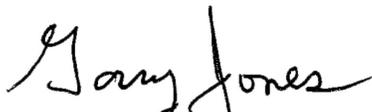
Bowling Congress and starting the International UAW Bowling Tournament in 1948, where black and white UAW members could bowl together.

Reuther was instrumental in starting Earth Day, which also celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2020. After hosting a major conference on water quality, United Action for Clean Water, in 1965, Reuther and the UAW created a permanent Conservation Department to work towards limiting the industrial effluence, banning DDT and lobbying for better fuel economy for automobiles. Reuther believed that laborers are first and foremost American citizens and consumers who breathe the same air and drink and bathe in the same water as their neighbors in other professions. Reuther championed Earth Day by donating money, producing all the printed materials and encouraging workers across the nation to participate.

Reuther was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom and was recognized by *Time* Magazine as one of the 100 most influential people of the 20th century. Reuther's legacy lives on in the lives of all Americans who benefit from his contributions to society. We have enclosed a petition with \_\_\_\_\_ names of people who are urging the Committee and Postmaster General to produce a stamp commemorating this great American leader.

Thank you for your consideration.

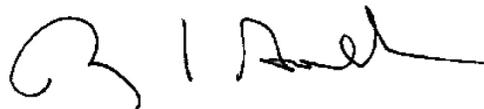
Sincerely,

  
UAW President, Gary Jones

  
UAW Secretary-Treasurer, Ray Curry

  
UAW Vice President, Terry Dittes

  
UAW Vice President, Cindy Estrada

  
UAW Vice President, Rory Gamble