

## **Lincoln Caretaker's Death Brings House-Passed Benefits**

The Washington Post

July 16, 1993

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The House of Representatives, touched by the plight of a federal worker who died caring for the Lincoln Memorial but had no job benefits, waived its own rules yesterday and voted to give the family of James Hudson almost \$40,000.

Hudson spent eight years maintaining the memorial but was classified as a temporary employee ineligible for benefits granted permanent workers, including life insurance.

Yesterday, lawmakers called Hudson's situation a disgrace and introduced legislation that would help other long-term temporary workers like him. The bill has been named the James Hudson Temporary Employee Equity Act of 1993.

Marlene "Inga" Hudson, Hudson's widow, said she and her family are grateful for the House vote and for the unexpected outpouring of support from strangers who read about their plight in The Washington Post.

The legislation named for her husband makes her feel proud and hopeful, said Hudson, who is now the sole support of seven children.

"Something good has come out of the death of my husband," she said. "This legislation means no one else will have to go through what this family went through last week."

Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-D.C.), who initiated the effort to get compensation, called the proposal to aid Hudson's family "small and compassionate." She said the \$38,400 roughly equaled the minimum life insurance benefit Hudson would have received if he had been considered a permanent employee.

"This means we have a much better chance of surviving," said Inga Hudson, who runs a day-care center from her Northeast Washington apartment, earning about \$10,000 a year. Her husband's annual salary at the time of his death was \$29,000.

The measure now goes to the Senate, where supporters are optimistic about its chances; one senator has already offered to sponsor the bill, and no opposition has emerged.

Norton said she succeeded in getting the House vote because "the life of James Hudson and the plight of the Hudson family seized the imagination and touched the hearts of members."

Because Hudson was employed by the National Park Service, which is part of the Interior Department, Norton attached her proposal to Interior's annual appropriations bill. House

rules forbid such a maneuver, requiring that spending proposals be debated separately from other legislative matters.

If any one of the House's 435 members had objected, Norton's proposal would have been ruled out of order.

But because of the widespread attention Hudson's death has received, both Democratic and Republican leaders urged lawmakers to go along with Norton's initiative. No questions were raised, and it was approved by a voice vote.

Debate in the House yesterday showed that the circumstances of Hudson's life and death had clearly hit home with a some lawmakers.

Hudson, a 43-year-old District resident, died July 5 after working three eight-hour shifts over two days in the sweltering holiday heat. He supervised a crew that maintained several of the Mall's most prominent monuments but had taken a personal interest in the famous Lincoln statue.

Hudson regularly dusted and washed the marble figure of Lincoln, and a picture of him atop the statue appeared in a calendar that The Post sent to its subscribers. He was praised by co-workers for his diligence and cheerful demeanor.

After reading media accounts of Hudson's death, Rep. Bill Barrett (R-Neb.) called Norton and volunteered to co-sponsor her proposal. He said bending the rules was "the right thing to do" because it was "the quickest and surest way" to approve the payment.

Rep. Sidney Yates (D-Ill.), chairman of the Interior appropriations subcommittee, sponsored Norton's proposal and called Hudson "conscientious, industrious and liked by all who knew him."

But Norton and several other lawmakers emphasized that Hudson was far from alone, and vowed to use his death to improve the lot of other workers without job benefits.

Under legislation proposed yesterday by Rep. Frank McCloskey (D- Ind.) and Norton, temporary employees would be able to buy life insurance when first reporting for work. Employees would also be able to buy health insurance after six months on the job.

McCloskey has championed legislation requiring the federal government to provide full benefits to any worker employed four years or longer. He has accused the government of abusing the temporary worker classification to cut costs and understate the number of employees on the payroll.

According to the Office of Personnel Management, the federal government employs about 157,000 temporary workers, most in the Agriculture and Interior departments.

The office estimates that 92 percent of the temporary workers stay on the payroll for two years or less. Only about 1 percent stay longer than four years.

Staff writers Steve Barr and Linda Wheeler contributed to this report.