

Board Meeting  
March 12, 2020

## AWARD HONORARY DEGREES, URBANA

**Action:** Award Honorary Degrees

**Funding:** No New Funding Required

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Senate has nominated the following persons for conferral of honorary degrees at the Commencement exercises in May 2020. The Chancellor, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Vice President, University of Illinois recommends approval of these nominations.

**Lonnie Bunch III, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution** -- the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters

Lonnie Bunch III made history when he was the first African American named Secretary of the Smithsonian Institutions. In that capacity, he oversees the most prestigious and arguably most comprehensive museum complexes in the world. His portfolio includes 19 museums, 21 libraries, the National Zoo, numerous research centers, and several education units and centers. The Smithsonian, as this complex is commonly referred to, hosts upward of 30 million visitors a year and has an annual budget of \$1.2 billion.

Previously, Bunch was the director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture. When he started as director in July 2005, he had one staff member, no collections, no funding, and no site for a museum. Driven by optimism, determination and commitment to build "a place that would make America better," Bunch transformed a vision into a bold reality. The museum has welcomed more than 6 million visitors since it opened in September 2016 and compiled a collection of 40,000 objects that are housed in the first "green building" on the National Mall.

In his capacity as historian and educator, Bunch has been in the museum business for practically his entire career, including years of service in Illinois. From 1983 to 1989, Bunch worked as a curator and then as director at the California African American Museum. He has moved back and forth across the U.S. ever since. While he has had deep ties to the Smithsonian across the years – he was a curator at the National Museum of American History from 1989-1994 – among his most influential stints was as president of the Chicago Historical Society from 2000 to 2005. Now known as the Chicago History Museum, it is one of the oldest museums in the country.

In 2005, Bunch was lured away from his job heading the Chicago Historical Society. He had been asked to transform an idea for a museum into the National Museum of African American History and Culture. Congress committed land but no resources. He found others inspired by his vision for a museum, staff willing to serve, advisory members who gave, and got financial support for the museum. And, ultimately, he found donors as committed as he to its opening.

**Jill Ellis, Development Director, United States Soccer Federation** -- the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters

Jill Ellis is an exemplary leader and one of the most celebrated soccer coaches in the world. She is the winningest coach in U.S. soccer history and the only person to win back-to-back Women's World Cups. She has also used her athletics platform to champion efforts to close the gender pay gap and to celebrate LGBTQ inclusion. Illinois gave Ellis her first head coaching position in the first year we had a women's soccer program.

Ellis has said she credits her English degree with providing her insights into people and culture, and with the analytical skills she needed to relate to her teammates and to coach at the highest levels in her sport. Though her path had not been a traditional one for those who graduate as English majors, Ellis is an example of the power of English literature to prepare students for any career they wish to pursue.

Ellis was inducted into the William & Mary Athletics Hall of Fame in 2002, was named a William & Mary Tribe Champion for Life in 2015, and was honored as their 2018 Alumni Medallion. She also has an honorary doctorate from that institution. Off the field, Ellis has emerged as an advocate for addressing the gender gap, pushing for equal pay for equal work. After the 2019 USWNT win, several of her players brought renewed attention to the disparities between the salaries they made and those made by the U.S. Men's team, despite the latter's comparative lack of success internationally. Ellis was able to navigate her role as an employee of U.S. Soccer, while also supporting and inspiring her players to

stand up for their rights. She has also been a role model for LGBTQ athletes by championing inclusion on her teams.

Ellis has had a tremendously successful athletics career. But more importantly, she has used her career to elevate issues that matter to her and her players that have broad social implications.

**John Lewis, U.S. Representative, Georgia's 5<sup>th</sup> Congressional District** -- the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters

Congressman John Lewis has been a member of the United States House of Representatives since 1987. He is in his 17th term serving Georgia's 5th District. He was a leading profile of courage in the Civil Rights Movement, the chief organizer of the Freedom Rides that disrupted and dismantled segregation law in the American South, and is a humanitarian, statesman, and prolific writer, educator, and role model for our youth. For the last six decades, his efforts have transformed our nation, even the world, into a more just, humane, inclusive, and responsive space for humanity. Congressman Lewis has tirelessly fought for peace and sought justice, equality, and voting rights for everyday citizens in the United States.

Born the son of sharecroppers outside Troy, Alabama, in 1940, Congressman Lewis came of age in the segregated South. He attended segregated public schools, witnessed his elders and peers denied their voting rights and equality because of the color of their skin, and bore the scars and pains of violence inflicted upon he and his family because of their insistence to challenge Jim Crow laws and practices in favor of freedom and equality.

As a young person, Lewis was inspired by the activism in the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Both thrust him into participating in the growing mass movement for human rights and freedoms that became the Civil Rights Movement. During the height of this movement, 1963 to 1966, Congressman Lewis would be named chairman of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), an organization he helped form. He coordinated countless efforts to organize voter registration drives in Mississippi, Georgia, and Alabama. Before leaving SNCC in 1966, Congressman Lewis remained a shining example of the principles and philosophy of non-violence in the countless marches and freedom rides he led.

Congressman Lewis continued his life of public service following the Civil Rights Movement. In 1977, he was appointed by President Jimmy Carter to direct more than 250,000 volunteers of ACTION, the federal volunteer agency. In 1981, he was elected to the Atlanta City Council, and in 1986, he was elected to Congress

as the U.S. Representative of Georgia's Fifth Congressional District, of which he continues to serve.

Congressman Lewis is the recipient of over 40 awards and recognitions, including the Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor, granted by President Barack Obama. Most recently, Congressman Lewis co-authored with Andrew Aydin and illustrated by Nate Powell, a trilogy of graphic novels entitled MARCH. The trilogy explains his life and understanding of the Civil Rights Movement and is written in a format and style to teach adolescent youth about the Civil Rights Movement and the importance of activism and engagement to protect and preserve human rights. It has been adopted into the core curriculum of many school systems across the nation, and has been selected as a First-Year common reading text at colleges and universities including the University of Illinois at Springfield.

Congressman Lewis' story is empowering and truly one of perseverance. He continues to inspire and unite humanity, and continues to serve as guide and teacher for us to better ourselves. He is an example for all, a leader among leaders, and one of the most inspiring profiles of courage our nation has ever produced.

The Board action recommended in this item complies in all material respects with applicable State and federal laws, University of Illinois *Statutes, The General Rules Concerning University Organization and Procedure*, and Board of Trustees policies and directives.

The Executive Vice President and Vice President for Academic Affairs concurs with this recommendation.

The President of the University recommends approval.