

Memphis building named after Ku Klux Klan leader to be renamed for first Black federal judge

By **FOX13 Memphis.com News Staff**

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MEMPHIS, Tenn. — A Bluff City building will get a new name after Tennessee lawmakers passed a bill to rename it after the first black federal judge.

The building was previously named after Clifford Davis, a Ku Klux Klan leader and supporter of Jim Crow laws.

Congressman Steve Cohen (TN-09), a senior member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, released a statement after the committee passed bill H.R. 390, which would designate the Federal Building in Memphis as the Odell Horton Federal Building.

The building is located at 167 N. Main St. downtown.

The bill was passed by a voice vote and is now eligible for consideration by the full House of Representatives, according to the release.

Before the vote, Cohen said, in part:

“This is the first bill I spoke for in Congress back in 2007. I had thought about naming the building just for Judge Horton at the time, but I didn’t think the political will was there. So we named the building that had been named for (Congressman) Clifford Davis, the Clifford Davis – Odell Horton Building.

Judge Horton left a remarkable legacy as the first black federal judge appointed since Reconstruction.

When he passed away in 2006, an editorial in The Commercial Appeal stated, 'Few people could match his service and leadership in the community and his dedication to the law.'

Now I believe it is past time to rename the building solely for the barrier-breaking jurist and remove the name of Clifford Davis, a one-time Ku Klux Klan member and supporter of Jim Crow laws.

Clifford Davis signed the Southern Manifesto, a resolution denouncing the Supreme Court's landmark 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision. He also voted against the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which banned segregation in public places and prohibited employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin.

Recently, Clifford Davis's family even released a statement supporting the removal of his name from the building.

They said, 'We are proud of Cliff Davis' many contributions to Memphis, but his membership in the Klan and support for Jim Crow cannot be excused.'

I completely agree and believe it is time to ensure that our community can look with pride and respect to the Federal Building in Memphis.

It is time to fully recognize Judge Horton's contributions and life of public service and solely name the federal building in his honor.

I want to thank all the members of the Tennessee Delegation, including Mr. Burchett who sits on this Committee, for cosponsoring this important legislation.

A renaming ceremony is scheduled for July 25 at 10 a.m. at Civic Center Plaza in front of the Odell Horton Federal Building.