

SENATE RESOLUTION

8619

By Senator O'Ban

1 WHEREAS, The institution of slavery denied men and women of color
2 basic rights enshrined in our nation's founding document, the
3 Declaration of Independence; and

4 WHEREAS, Controversy over slavery resulted in the bloodiest war
5 in U.S. history, resulting in the deaths of an estimated 2.5 percent
6 of the population or 504 deaths for every day of the war; and

7 WHEREAS, In an effort to guarantee the union would be preserved,
8 its sacrifices would not be in vain, and that slavery would never
9 taint or divide the nation again, President Abraham Lincoln issued
10 the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 and fought tirelessly and
11 strategically for the passage of the 13th Amendment to the U.S.
12 Constitution, which banned slavery from the United States forever;
13 and

14 WHEREAS, The assassination of Abraham Lincoln brought to the
15 presidency Vice President Andrew Johnson, who lacked commitment to
16 the civil rights of the former slaves of the South; and

17 WHEREAS, President Johnson failed to stand up to efforts within
18 the former confederacy to repress the rights of black Americans
19 through the enactment of "Black Codes" and other discriminatory
20 legislation and practices; and

21 WHEREAS, Congressional leadership forced a reconstruction agenda
22 that expanded civil rights and the promise of a more equal union; and

1 WHEREAS, The agenda of that era included the ratification of the
2 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution, which
3 abolished slavery, ensured the citizenship of former slaves,
4 guaranteed equal protection under the law, and proclaimed the right
5 of citizens to vote regardless of race, color, or previous condition
6 of servitude; and

7 WHEREAS, Over the objections of President Johnson, Congress
8 passed a series of Reconstruction Acts in an attempt to build a more
9 equal union; and

10 WHEREAS, The Reconstruction era led to numerous historic
11 elections within the United States including more than 1,500 African-
12 American officeholders, including fourteen members of Congress, six
13 lieutenant governors, and more than six hundred state legislators
14 throughout the south; and

15 WHEREAS, The Reconstruction era led to the election of the first
16 African-American member of Congress, Joseph Hayne Rainey, who served
17 with distinction for the state of South Carolina, fought for civil
18 rights and against the terrorist violence of the Ku Klux Klan, and
19 became the first African-American to preside over the United States
20 House of Representatives by stepping in for Speaker James G. Blaine
21 in April of 1874; and

22 WHEREAS, Also among the notable individuals elected were Hiram
23 Revels of Mississippi, a veteran of the Civil War who became the
24 first African-American senator in 1870; and Blanche K. Bruce, a
25 former sheriff and sergeant at arms for the Mississippi State Senate,
26 who became the second African-American elected to the U.S. Senate in
27 1874; men whose accomplishments are even more remarkable considering
28 that since then, no African-American man or woman has represented a
29 southern state in the U.S. Senate until 2013 when Tim Scott was
30 elected in South Carolina; and

31 WHEREAS, The Reconstruction era is a key chapter to understanding
32 the story of freedom for all Americans in the United States and is
33 essential to the understanding of the story of freedom for African-
34 Americans in particular; and

35 WHEREAS, The Reconstruction era was cut short by the compromised
36 election of 1878, and the failure to follow through and ensure the
37 success and continuation of Reconstruction era civil rights efforts
38 diminished the progress of racial equality for the next one hundred
39 years; and

1 WHEREAS, The flame of hope from the Reconstruction era faded but
2 never died and was carried by later champions of freedom until it
3 blazed again in the challenge of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who
4 called upon the nation to honor the "promissory note" in the "words
5 of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence," and would
6 culminate in an end to segregation and state-sanctioned
7 discrimination;

8 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the Washington State Senate
9 recognize the 150th anniversary of the passage of the First
10 Reconstruction Act, which passed over President Johnson's veto on
11 March 2, 1867.

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