

SENATE RESOLUTION

8611

By Senator O'Ban

1       WHEREAS, The evil and abhorrent practice of slavery reached the  
2 shores of colonial America less than a century after the first  
3 European settlement there, starting with the first Africans who were  
4 brought, against their will, to Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619, a year  
5 before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth; and

6       WHEREAS, The establishment of slavery in colonial America became  
7 a cruel irony since the United States of America, the land of the  
8 free, was later founded on the principles embodied in our Declaration  
9 of Independence that "all men are created equal" and "endowed by  
10 their Creator" with "certain unalienable Rights" including "Life,  
11 liberty and the pursuit of Happiness;" and

12       WHEREAS, African Americans were denied these rights by the  
13 practice of slavery; and

14       WHEREAS, When the Founding Fathers met in 1787 to create the  
15 Constitution and set America's new federal government on a firm  
16 course, compromises were made, including allowing slavery to  
17 continue, denying African Americans their individual rights and  
18 dignity, tearing apart families, and contradicting the American  
19 values enshrined in the Declaration of Independence; and

20       WHEREAS, By 1860, nearly four million slaves, one-eighth of  
21 America's population at that time, were kept in bondage in America's  
22 Southern or border states, and those who supported slavery in America

1 sought to "strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest  
2 [slavery]" even at the cost of a Civil War; and

3 WHEREAS, The American Civil War began in 1861 and lasted  
4 four bloody years, resulting in more than 650,000 deaths  
5 suffered between the two sides; and

6 WHEREAS, On January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln took  
7 a monumental first step toward ending slavery in America by  
8 issuing the Emancipation Proclamation, which declared that the  
9 slaves of the Confederate states that rebelled against the Union  
10 were free; and

11 WHEREAS, President Lincoln fought valiantly for the passage  
12 of a 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution, to ban  
13 slavery in America forever, but a bullet fired by a Confederate  
14 sympathizer ended Lincoln's life eight months before the 13th  
15 Amendment was ratified on December 6, 1865; and

16 WHEREAS, The potential for a full and meaningful  
17 Reconstruction following the Civil War died with President  
18 Lincoln's assassination just days after the Confederate capital  
19 fell, and the largest Confederate army surrendered; and

20 WHEREAS, Vice President Andrew Johnson, who assumed the  
21 presidency upon Lincoln's death, failed to lead a reunited  
22 America to a complete and true Reconstruction, as Johnson lacked  
23 commitment to the civil rights of the former slaves; and

24 WHEREAS, President Johnson failed to thwart the efforts  
25 within the former Confederate states to suppress the rights of  
26 African Americans through enactment of "Black Codes" and other  
27 discriminatory laws and practices; and

28 WHEREAS, The "Radical Republicans" led Congress to enact a  
29 Reconstruction agenda that expanded civil rights and sought to  
30 realize the goal of a more equal America; and

31 WHEREAS, The national achievements of the Reconstruction era  
32 included the ratification of the 13th Amendment, as well as the  
33 1868 ratification of the 14th Amendment, which ensured the  
34 citizenship of former slaves, and guaranteed equal protection  
35 under the law, and the 1870 ratification of the 15th Amendment,  
36 which proclaimed the rights of citizens to vote, regardless of  
37 "race, color, or previous condition of servitude;" and

1           WHEREAS, America's Reconstruction era saw the historic  
2 election of about two thousand African American officeholders in  
3 our nation, from local positions and state legislative seats to  
4 the United States Senate, a period that would give African  
5 Americans a more active role in the political, economic, and  
6 social life of the South; and

7           WHEREAS, The Reconstruction era ended after federal troops  
8 withdrew from the old Confederacy in 1877, soon followed by the  
9 overt and covert efforts of many Southern whites to reverse the  
10 newfound freedoms of African Americans, such as passage of laws  
11 in Southern states that took away rights of African Americans,  
12 including preventing them from freely participating in  
13 elections; and

14           WHEREAS, Despite these setbacks, the dream of equal rights  
15 for African Americans continued to flicker for nearly a century  
16 until it reignited with the civil rights movement in the 1960s,  
17 led by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and others, and  
18 was advanced by the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the  
19 1965 Voting Rights Act, both of which received strong bipartisan  
20 support in Congress;

21           NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the Washington State  
22 Senate remember, recognize, and honor America's Reconstruction  
23 era and its advances in civil rights for African Americans.

24 I, Brad Hendrickson, Secretary of the Senate,  
25 do hereby certify that this is a true and  
26 correct copy of Senate Resolution 8611,  
27 adopted by the Senate  
28 February 1, 2019

29 BRAD HENDRICKSON  
30 Secretary of the Senate