

SENATE RESOLUTION

8635

By Senators Braun, Holy, C. Wilson, Mullet, Warnick, L. Wilson, Rivers, Boehnke, Lovick, Salomon, Valdez, Fortunato, Wellman, Muzzall, Keiser, Hunt, Wagoner, Dozier, Schoesler, Torres, Padden, King, Hawkins, Gildon, Short, and Hasegawa

1       WHEREAS, Bill Russell was one of the greatest basketball players  
2 of all time and was a trailblazer for the National Basketball  
3 Association and basketball as a sport; and

4       WHEREAS, At the peak of his Hall of Fame athletic career, Bill  
5 Russell was also a leading advocate for civil rights who inspired  
6 future generations of NBA players to promote social justice; and

7       WHEREAS, Bill Russell was born February 12, 1934, in Monroe,  
8 Louisiana, where his family faced the racism common in the segregated  
9 South, and when Bill was eight years old his family moved to Oakland,  
10 California; and

11       WHEREAS, Bill Russell accepted a scholarship to play basketball  
12 at the University of San Francisco, where he had two other Black  
13 players as teammates, and while they were often targets of racial  
14 jabs, Russell said he never permitted himself to be a victim; and

15       WHEREAS, While Bill Russell played at USF the team, called the  
16 Dons, went to two NCAA championships, 1955 and 1956, and he also  
17 starred on the gold medal-winning United States basketball team at  
18 the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne, Australia; and

19       WHEREAS, In one of the most important sports transactions in  
20 American history, Bill Russell was the second overall pick in the  
21 1956 NBA Draft, being drafted to the St. Louis Hawks then traded to  
22 the Boston Celtics; and

1       WHEREAS, From 1956 to 1969, Bill Russell led the Celtics to eight  
2 consecutive NBA championships from 1959 to 1966, with his court savvy  
3 and defensive skills changing how the game was played; and

4       WHEREAS, The 6-foot-10-inch center earned the nickname "Secretary  
5 of Defense," winning the title of NBA's most valuable player five  
6 times and being named an All-Star 12 times; and

7       WHEREAS, In 1966 he became the first Black head coach in the NBA,  
8 both coaching and playing for the Celtics until 1969; and

9       WHEREAS, Former U.S. Senator Bill Bradley, who as a member of the  
10 New York Knicks played against Bill Russell in the 1960s, viewed him  
11 as "the smartest player ever to play the game and the epitome of a  
12 team leader"; and

13       WHEREAS, In 1972 the NBA retired his number 6 jersey, and it  
14 remains the only number to become retired league-wide; and

15       WHEREAS, Bill Russell was hailed in 1996 as one of the NBA's 50  
16 greatest players, and in 2009, the trophy for the Most Valuable  
17 Player of the NBA Finals was named in his honor; and

18       WHEREAS, Standing alongside his many achievements on the hardwood  
19 are his efforts as a civil rights activist; and

20       WHEREAS, In 1963 he took part in the March on Washington for Jobs  
21 and Freedom and was front row at Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous  
22 "I Have a Dream" speech; and

23       WHEREAS, Bill Russell also spent time in Mississippi after civil  
24 rights activist Medgar Evers was murdered, and would later create an  
25 integrated basketball camp with Evers' brother, Charles, in Jackson,  
26 Mississippi; and

27       WHEREAS, Bill Russell was awarded the Presidential Medal of  
28 Freedom in 2011 by President Barack Obama, for standing up for the  
29 rights and dignity of all; and

30       WHEREAS, Bill Russell's ties to the state of Washington date to  
31 1973, when he became the general manager and coach for the Seattle  
32 SuperSonics; and

33       WHEREAS, Bill Russell called Mercer Island home from 1973 until  
34 his passing on July 31, 2022, having chosen the community because of  
35 the quality of its school system;

36       NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the Washington State Senate  
37 honor the life and accomplishments of longtime Washington resident  
38 Bill Russell both inside and outside the arena, and extend its

1 condolences to his widow Jeannine and his three children, William  
2 Russell Jr., Jacob Russell, and Karen Kenyatta Russell.

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