

SENATE RESOLUTION

8606

By Senator Wagoner

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 8606,
27 adopted by the Senate
28 February 4, 2021

29 BRAD HENDRICKSON
30 Secretary of the Senate