

SENATE RESOLUTION
8625

By Senators Swecker, Franklin, Sheldon, B., Zarelli, Hale, Johnson, Fraser, Winsley, Rasmussen and Costa

WHEREAS, February is designated as Black History Month; and

WHEREAS, African Americans are an integral part of Washington's diverse population and rich history, being among the first non-Native Americans to settle in the area, which was to become the Washington Territory and ultimately the state of Washington; and

WHEREAS, George Washington, an African American, settled and founded the town of Centralia, Washington, causing this area to develop and prosper; and

WHEREAS, George Washington left the racial discrimination of his native Missouri first for Illinois, where he encountered further discrimination, and then for the Oregon Territory in 1850; and

WHEREAS, in 1852, George Washington staked a land claim at the fork of the Skookumchuck and Chehalis Rivers, in what is present-day Washington State; and

WHEREAS, racial discrimination continued to haunt George Washington, threatening his ability to settle in Oregon and hold land; and

WHEREAS, George Washington was able to avoid much of the full effects of this discrimination because his settlement was north of the Columbia River, in what became the Washington Territory in 1853, and was thus not subject to the Oregon Territory's "Black Exclusion Law," under which African Americans were excluded from Oregon under pain of whipping; and

WHEREAS, George Washington was able to secure his land and prosper as a frontier farmer, marrying Mary Jane Cooness in 1869; and

WHEREAS, In 1872, the Northern Pacific Railroad pushed its rail line across his farm, George Washington, seeing a chance for economic opportunity, registered at the county seat in Chehalis a town plat he originally called Centerville in 1875; and

WHEREAS, in 1883, George Washington changed the name of his town plat from Centerville to Centralia, and the town grew and prospered, and George Washington's wealth grew along with it; and

WHEREAS, George Washington continued to be a benefactor to Centralia, donating plots of land for churches, parks, and public buildings, earning a reputation for generosity among his neighbors; and

WHEREAS, his reputation for generosity was proven by his actions during a depression which hit the area in 1893, throughout which George Washington bought and distributed large amounts of food and lent money at no interest to those in need; and

WHEREAS, the depression eventually receded and Centralia again prospered, but some white newcomers to the town resented George Washington's prominence as the town's founder, and he was surreptitiously poisoned in 1898. He survived, but the perpetrators were never discovered; and

WHEREAS, despite these racial problems, George Washington's friends greatly outnumbered his enemies and, when George Washington died from injuries in a buggy accident, all businesses in Centralia closed so that residents could attend his funeral; and

WHEREAS, George Washington encountered and overcame the difficulties of frontier life, exacerbated by racial prejudice, to achieve success and prominence in Washington history and the western movement;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Washington State Senate hereby recognizes and honors one of our founding settlers, George Washington, in honor of his contribution to our state, and deems it all the more appropriate to honor this great man during this month of February, Black History Month, 2001; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a copy of this resolution be immediately transmitted by the Secretary of the Senate to the Washington State History Museum, the University of Washington, Washington State University, Central Washington University, Eastern Washington University, Western Washington University, The Evergreen State College, Lewis County Historical Society and the City of Centralia.

I, Tony M. Cook, Secretary of the Senate, do hereby certify that this is a true and correct copy of Senate Resolution 8625, adopted by the Senate February 28, 2001.

TONY M. COOK
Secretary of the Senate

