SENATE RESOLUTION

8606

By Senator Wagoner

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS, By 1860, nearly four million slaves, one-eighth of America's population at that time, were kept in bondage in America's Southern or border states, and those who supported slavery in America sought to "strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest [slavery]" even at the cost of a Civil War; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I, Brad Hendrickson, Secretary of the Senate,

do hereby certify that this is a true and

correct copy of Senate Resolution 8606,

adopted by the Senate

February 4, 2021

BRAD HENDRICKSON

Secretary of the Senate