SENATE RESOLUTION

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By Senator O'Ban

WHEREAS, The institution of slavery denied men and women of color basic rights enshrined in our nation's founding document, the Declaration of Independence; and

WHEREAS, Controversy over slavery resulted in the bloodiest war in U.S. history, resulting in the deaths of an estimated 2.5 percent of the population or 504 deaths for every day of the war; and

WHEREAS, In an effort to guarantee the union would be preserved, its sacrifices would not be in vain, and that slavery would never taint or divide the nation again, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 and fought tirelessly and strategically for the passage of the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which banned slavery from the United States forever; and

WHEREAS, The assassination of Abraham Lincoln brought to the presidency Vice President Andrew Johnson, who lacked commitment to the civil rights of the former slaves of the South; and

WHEREAS, President Johnson failed to stand up to efforts within the former confederacy to repress the rights of black Americans through the enactment of "Black Codes" and other discriminatory legislation and practices; and

WHEREAS, Congressional leadership forced a reconstruction agenda that expanded civil rights and the promise of a more equal union; and

WHEREAS, The agenda of that era included the ratification of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution, which abolished slavery, ensured the citizenship of former slaves, guaranteed equal protection under the law, and proclaimed the right of citizens to vote regardless of race, color, or previous condition of servitude; and

WHEREAS, Over the objections of President Johnson, Congress passed a series of Reconstruction Acts in an attempt to build a more equal union; and

WHEREAS, The Reconstruction era led to numerous historic elections within the United States including more than 1,500 African-American officeholders, including fourteen members of Congress, six lieutenant governors, and more than six hundred state legislators throughout the south; and

WHEREAS, The Reconstruction era led to the election of the first African-American member of Congress, Joseph Hayne Rainey, who served with distinction for the state of South Carolina, fought for civil rights and against the terrorist violence of the Ku Klux Klan, and became the first African-American to preside over the United States House of Representatives by stepping in for Speaker James G. Blaine in April of 1874; and

WHEREAS, Also among the notable individuals elected were Hiram Revels of Mississippi, a veteran of the Civil War who became the first African-American senator in 1870; and Blanche K. Bruce, a former sheriff and sergeant at arms for the Mississippi State Senate, who became the second African-American elected to the U.S. Senate in 1874; men whose accomplishments are even more remarkable considering that since then, no African-American man or woman has represented a southern state in the U.S. Senate until 2013 when Tim Scott was elected in South Carolina; and

WHEREAS, The Reconstruction era is a key chapter to understanding the story of freedom for all Americans in the United States and is essential to the understanding of the story of freedom for African-Americans in particular; and

WHEREAS, The Reconstruction era was cut short by the compromised election of 1878, and the failure to follow through and ensure the success and continuation of Reconstruction era civil rights efforts diminished the progress of racial equality for the next one hundred years; and

WHEREAS, The flame of hope from the Reconstruction era faded but never died and was carried by later champions of freedom until it blazed again in the challenge of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who called upon the nation to honor the "promissory note" in the "words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence," and would culminate in an end to segregation and state-sanctioned discrimination;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the Washington State Senate recognize the 150th anniversary of the passage of the First Reconstruction Act, which passed over President Johnson's veto on March 2, 1867.