

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, Conway, Hasegawa, and Kuderer

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
2 eight consecutive NBA championships from 1959 to 1966, with his
3 court savvy and defensive skills changing how the game was
4 played; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

37 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the Washington State
38 Senate honor the life and accomplishments of longtime Washington

1 resident Bill Russell both inside and outside the arena, and
2 extend its condolences to his widow Jeannine and his three
3 children, William Russell Jr., Jacob Russell, and Karen Kenyatta
4 Russell.

5 I, Sarah Bannister, Secretary of the Senate,
6 do hereby certify that this is a true and
7 correct copy of Senate Resolution 8635,
8 adopted by the Senate
9 April 6, 2023

10 SARAH BANNISTER
11 Secretary of the Senate