

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 2023-4625, by Representatives Wilcox and Lekanoff

1 WHEREAS, Billy Frank Jr. was born March 9, 1931, to Willie Sr.
2 and Angeline Frank. Frank Jr., a member of the Nisqually Tribe, grew
3 up on six acres along the banks of the Nisqually River in Thurston
4 County. Known as Frank's Landing, the property was purchased by
5 Willie Frank after development of the Fort Lewis Army Base in 1917
6 drove the Nisqually people from their reservation; and

7 WHEREAS, Frank's formal education ended after he completed the
8 ninth grade in Olympia, after which he worked in construction by day
9 and fishing by night; and

10 WHEREAS, In 1952, at age 21, Frank fulfilled a dream to join the
11 Marines, proudly serving in the Marine Corps for two years as an
12 expert marksman; and

13 WHEREAS, Frank's father, Willie, and his predecessors, lived in a
14 time of abundance, with strong salmon runs and plentiful clams,
15 oysters, geoducks, wild berries, and camas roots. Frank was raised in
16 the tradition of his ancestors, with stories of the land, the river,
17 the salmon runs, and the art of preserving fish; and

18 WHEREAS, Binding promises made by the United States acknowledged,
19 through treaties, the rights of tribes to take fish "at all usual and
20 accustomed stations," and "in common with the citizens of the
21 territory" of Washington; and

22 WHEREAS, These treaty rights were increasingly eroded during
23 Frank's lifetime through commercial and recreational fishing by

1 nontribal actors, and aggressive and unjust state and local policing
2 of tribal fishing. Combined with expansive growth, construction,
3 property development, and pollution further depleted the plentiful
4 salmon and other natural resources which had traditionally sustained
5 tribal people in Washington; and

6 WHEREAS, Frank began what became a lifetime of advocacy,
7 leadership, and statesmanship in 1945, when he protested his arrest
8 at age 14 by two game wardens, simply for fishing on the Nisqually
9 River near his family's property. He would spend his lifetime
10 challenging the state and nation to live up to its ideals; and

11 WHEREAS, By the mid 1960's Frank's Landing was a focal point for
12 the assertion of treaty rights and tribal sovereignty. Over the next
13 decade, Washington State would raid, arrest, and campaign against the
14 fishing rights of Pacific Northwest tribes; and

15 WHEREAS, Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Frank led historic
16 "fish-ins," demonstrations, and acts of civil resistance with other
17 tribal and nontribal leaders, insisting on the treaty rights
18 guaranteed more than a century before. In attempting to defend his
19 treaty rights Frank was arrested numerous times; and

20 WHEREAS, Growing public awareness of the unjust infringement upon
21 tribal treaty fishing rights in Washington ultimately resulted in the
22 historic litigation and decision issued in *United States v.*
23 *Washington*, in which the Honorable George Boldt recognized tribal
24 treaty fishing rights as the supreme law of the land; and

25 WHEREAS, Following the Boldt decision, Frank's leadership,
26 humility, and dedication to consensus-building cut through initial,
27 blatant disregard of the decision by state and local authorities and
28 citizens and the resulting hardship and anger that caused among the
29 tribes; and

30 WHEREAS, Billy Frank Jr. resisted bitterness and confronted
31 injustice in ways that built strength by bringing diverse groups of
32 people with conflicting interests together; and

33 WHEREAS, At a time when he possessed the power to impose outcomes
34 favoring one group at the expense of others, he remained steadfast in
35 the fair and impartial defense of the rights of all landowners and
36 natural resources businesses along the Nisqually River, earning the
37 lasting goodwill of landowners in the Nisqually basin; and

38 WHEREAS, For more than 30 years, Frank served as Chairman of the
39 Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, created in 1975 to support the

1 natural resource management activities of the 20 treaty Indian tribes
2 in western Washington; and

3 WHEREAS, In March 2011, in honor of Frank's 80th birthday, the
4 Billy Frank Jr. Salmon Forever Fund was established by Salmon
5 Defense, "to honor and create permanence and action to the vision and
6 work of Billy Frank Jr.;" and

7 WHEREAS, Over his lifetime Frank was honored with countless
8 additional awards for his decades-long fight for justice and
9 environmental preservation, including: The Common Cause Award for
10 Human Rights Efforts, the Albert Schweitzer Prize for
11 Humanitarianism, the American Indian Distinguished Service Award, the
12 Wallace Stegner Award, the Washington State Environmental Excellence
13 Award, and the 2015 Washington State Medal of Merit. In 2015,
14 President Barack Obama named Frank Jr. posthumously as a recipient of
15 the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest official
16 civilian honor; and

17 WHEREAS, Billy Frank Jr. died May 5, 2014, at the age of 83.
18 Today, Chairman of the Nisqually Tribe Willie Frank III and his wife,
19 Peggen, continue the work of both father and grandfather. A good life
20 growing up at Frank's Landing instilled the dignity and respect that
21 informed the principles and guidelines of their leadership. His
22 family once said, "being with Billy is like floating on a steady,
23 easy river. Billy's life is turbulent, but Billy is not. He's the
24 happiest person I know. He's completely at peace with himself;" and

25 WHEREAS, In memory of what would have been Frank's 92nd birthday,
26 we honor his vision to "tell your story, tell the truth, and stay the
27 course" in the pursuit of community resilience and environmental
28 stewardship. We reflect on the man known as an architect of consensus
29 solutions. A man who brought previously contentious interest groups
30 together, through genuine respect and endeavoring to heal wounds, and
31 find resolution for the good of all people;

32 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, By the Washington State House of
33 Representatives, That we reflect in gratitude on Billy Frank Jr., the
34 man who taught us that no victory can last until the opposing sides
35 can come together in agreement; and

36 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That copies of this resolution be
37 forwarded to the family of Billy Frank Jr.

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