

SENATE RESOLUTION

8604

By Senators Wellman, Cleveland, Lovelett, Das, Dhingra, Frockt, Hasegawa, Muzzall, Nobles, Randall, Robinson, Rolfes, and Stanford

1 WHEREAS, In 2013, the Evergreen School District of Vancouver,
2 Washington, opened the Henrietta Lacks Health and Bioscience High
3 School, becoming the first organization to memorialize her publicly
4 and honor her legacy; and

5 WHEREAS, The students of this school have called upon the
6 Washington State Legislature to acknowledge the contribution of
7 Henrietta Lacks' cells to medical research; and

8 WHEREAS, As a Black woman with cervical cancer in 1951, Lacks
9 received medical care in a racially segregated ward of Johns Hopkins
10 Hospital where her doctor George Gey took samples from her biopsied
11 tumor without her consent; and

12 WHEREAS, Gey used these cells to create the first immortal cell
13 line, known as the "HeLa" cell line, which has been reproduced in
14 labs all over the world and used to develop some of the most
15 important breakthroughs in medicine; and

16 WHEREAS, These breakthroughs include extensive research into the
17 cures for cancer, treatment for HIV and AIDS, Parkinson's disease,
18 the effects of radiation, the polio vaccine, gene mapping, and
19 current development of a coronavirus vaccine; and

20 WHEREAS, As the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic brings devastation
21 around the world and the work of medical researchers is more relevant
22 than ever, we must recognize the impact Lacks has had on virology and
23 immunology and the relevance on our lives today; and

1 WHEREAS, Though there are almost 11,000 patents to date involving
2 use of the HeLa cell line, neither Henrietta nor her family gave
3 consent for their use or received financial compensation; and

4 WHEREAS, Too often, the role of marginalized people in developing
5 significant advances for humankind are unacknowledged;

6 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the Washington State
7 Legislature recognize the contribution of Henrietta Lacks' cells to
8 modern medicine and the educational, racial, and economic barriers
9 that played a role in her story; and

10 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, As the COVID-19 vaccine begins to be
11 distributed, let us recognize the debt we owe Henrietta Lacks and her
12 family; and

13 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That Lacks' story is a reminder of the
14 work left to be done in culturally-responsive medicine and education.

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