

By: Reynolds

H.C.R. No. 51

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

1 WHEREAS, In 2018, the discovery of an unmarked burial ground  
2 at the former Imperial State Prison Farm site in Sugar Land drew  
3 national attention to an abhorrent chapter in history; and

4 WHEREAS, Archeologists at the site found the skeletal remains  
5 of 95 victims of the convict leasing system, which was used after  
6 the Civil War to replicate the oppression that existed under  
7 slavery; although the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution  
8 prohibited involuntary servitude, it created an exemption for  
9 people convicted of crimes; Southern states took advantage by  
10 enacting "Black Codes," laws that applied only to African  
11 Americans, who could be prosecuted criminally for such offenses as  
12 loitering, breaking curfew, or not carrying proof of employment;  
13 and

14 WHEREAS, Prisoners of the state were leased as cheap labor to  
15 private railways, mines, and agricultural operations, including  
16 the sugar plantations along the Brazos River; while receiving no  
17 pay, convicts often endured conditions even more brutal than  
18 slavery, given that contractors had no financial interest in their  
19 well-being; more than 3,500 Texas prisoners died between 1866 and  
20 1912, when the legislature outlawed convict leasing; and

21 WHEREAS, While the state and employers profited, the families  
22 and communities of victims suffered damage that spanned  
23 generations; a full understanding of the convict leasing system and  
24 its aftereffects is vital to addressing issues that continue to

1 plague society today, including mass incarceration, convict labor,  
2 prison privatization, and entrenched poverty; now, therefore, be it

3       RESOLVED, That the 86th Legislature of the State of Texas  
4 hereby request the lieutenant governor and the speaker of the house  
5 of representatives to create a joint interim committee to study the  
6 legacy of convict leasing in Texas; and, be it further

7       RESOLVED, That the committee examine the treatment of victims  
8 of the convict leasing system, the extent to which the State of  
9 Texas supported the system, and the lingering negative effects of  
10 the system; and, be it further

11       RESOLVED, That the committee determine appropriate ways to  
12 educate the general public about the convict leasing system; and,  
13 be it further

14       RESOLVED, That the committee submit a full report, including  
15 findings and recommendations, to the 87th Texas Legislature in  
16 January 2021; and, be it further

17       RESOLVED, That the committee's proceedings and operations be  
18 governed by such general rules and policies for interim committees  
19 as the 86th Texas Legislature may adopt.