

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1870

As Reported by House Committee On:
State Government & Tribal Affairs

Title: An act relating to a Washington state day of remembrance for Juneteenth.

Brief Description: Recognizing Juneteenth as a day of remembrance.

Sponsors: Representatives Pedersen, Ross, Lovick, Bailey, Hunt, Hasegawa, Pettigrew, Skinner, Flannigan, Darneille, Roberts, Newhouse, Hankins, Walsh, Appleton, Santos, Lantz, McCoy, Rodne, Schual-Berke, Ormsby, Upthegrove, Morrell, Kessler, Williams, Kenney, McDermott and Chase.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government & Tribal Affairs: 2/20/07, 2/21/07 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes June 19 as Juneteenth, a day of remembrance for the day the slaves learned of their freedom.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL AFFAIRS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Hunt, Chair; Appleton, Vice Chair; Chandler, Ranking Minority Member; Armstrong, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Green, Kretz, McDermott, Miloscia and Ormsby.

Staff: Colleen Kerr (786-7168).

Background:

Juneteenth celebrations date back to 1865 when on June 19, Union soldiers, led by Major General Gordon Granger, landed at Galveston, Texas with news that the war had ended and the slaves were free. This was two and a half years after President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation became official on January 1, 1863.

The celebration of June 19 was soon coined "Juneteenth" and grew with participation from slaves' descendants. Indeed, Juneteenth continued to be highly revered in Texas, with many

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former slaves and descendants making an annual pilgrimage back to Galveston. Initially, Juneteenth was not celebrated outside African American communities. Most of the festivities were in rural areas around rivers and creeks that could provide for additional activities such as fishing, horseback riding and barbecues. Often church grounds were used for Juneteenth celebrations.

Juneteenth began to gain prominence during the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. In 1968, the Reverend Ralph Abernathy celebrated Juneteenth at the Poor Peoples March to Washington D.C. Many of those attending returned home and initiated Juneteenth celebrations in areas previously absent of such activity. The Juneteenth celebrations in Milwaukee and Minneapolis, which are two of the largest celebrations, were founded after the Poor Peoples March of 1968.

On January 1, 1980, Juneteenth became an official state holiday in Texas. It is considered a "partial staffing holiday" meaning that state offices do not close but some employees use a floating holiday to take the day off. Thirteen other states list it as an official holiday, including New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Alaska, and California. However, some of these states, such as Connecticut, do not consider it a legal holiday and do not close government offices in observance of the occasion. Its informal observance has spread to other states, including Alabama, with a few celebrations taking place in other countries.

Summary of Bill:

June 19 is declared as a day of remembrance for the day the slaves learned of their freedom and will be recognized as Juneteenth.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Juneteenth is often referred to as Emancipation Day and celebrates the day slaves actually knew of their freedom. It is a tremendous day of celebration and remembrance for many African-American families. Slavery is a not-so-distant history for many and Juneteenth presents an opportunity to set aside a day for remembrance and renewal and to celebrate the African-American experience in the United States. It is a day of inclusion when communities collectively recognize the evils of slavery and acknowledge how that history still binds both sides together. It is important for communities to set aside a day to celebrate peace and to affirmatively challenge the wasted energy of racism. People must always look back to move forward.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Pedersen, prime sponsor; and Representative Lovick.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.