

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## SB 5000

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
State Government & Tribal Relations

**Title:** An act relating to recognizing contributions of Americans of Chinese descent.

**Brief Description:** Recognizing contributions of Americans of Chinese descent.

**Sponsors:** Senators Wagoner, Boehnke, Braun, Conway, Dozier, Frame, Gildon, Hasegawa, Holy, King, Kuderer, MacEwen, Mullet, Muzzall, Pedersen, Rivers, Rolfes, Schoesler, Short, Torres, Warnick, Wellman, Wilson, J. and Wilson, L..

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

State Government & Tribal Relations: 3/21/23, 3/29/23 [DPA].

**Brief Summary of Bill**  
**(As Amended By Committee)**

- Designates January of each year as Chinese American/Americans of Chinese Descent History Month.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL RELATIONS

**Majority Report:** Do pass as amended. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Ramos, Chair; Stearns, Vice Chair; Abbarno, Ranking Minority Member; Christian, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Gregerson, Low and Mena.

**Staff:** Desiree Omli (786-7105).

**Background:**

According to the University of Washington's Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest, the first wave of Chinese immigration to the United States (US) occurred in 1849 after the

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discovery of gold in California. With the immigration to the west, Washington became home to many Chinese immigrants. By the 1870s Chinese miners in the Eastern Washington territory outnumbered non-Chinese miners nearly two to one. The Chinese population in Washington grew when construction of the Northern Pacific Railroad transcontinental line began in 1871, which ran from Wisconsin and Minnesota to Washington and Oregon, as many laborers who were recruited to work on the railroad were Chinese. According to the Washington State History Museum, after work on the railroad had finished, many Chinese workers moved into other industries such as salmon canning. With the onset of the economic depression in the 1880s finding work became more difficult and resentment against Chinese laborers grew. In the late nineteenth century, there were over 100 incidents of anti-Chinese violence in the Pacific Northwest. Expulsions, or forced removal, of Chinese people began taking place, the first of which occurred in Tacoma in 1885. Changes in policies impacting Chinese immigrants were seen in 1943 when an act was introduced in Congress by a Washington Senator and passed to repeal the Chinese Exclusion Act.

People of Chinese descent have made various contributions to the history of the US and Washington. Early Chinese settler Goon Dip is known as one of the most influential Chinese immigrants in the Pacific Northwest during the early twentieth century. He served as honorary consul for the 1909 Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition held in Seattle, which was Washington's first world's fair and attracted over 3 million tourists from around the world. Goon Dip was also influential in relocating Chinatown away from the Elliott Bay tidelands to the area east of the King Street Station, where he built the Milwaukee Hotel which housed many of the patrons who attended the 1909 exposition. Goon Dip was also influential in expanding the state's canning industry as he worked as a labor contractor for the largest salmon canning operation in the Northwest that became the largest single employer of people of Chinese descent in the region. China eventually named Goon Dip permanent consul and he served in that position until he died. Other influential Chinese immigrants include Wong Tsoo, who was born in China and studied at the Massachusetts Institute for Technology's aeronautical engineering program, became the first chief engineer hired by Boeing, and designed Boeing's first mass-produced airplane which was the Model C training seaplane. The US Navy purchased the Model C for use in World War I, which contributed to Boeing's first financial success. Another person of influence, Gary Locke, became the first Chinese American to be elected Governor on the US mainland in 1996. The 2021 American Community Survey estimates that there are approximately 4.4 million people of Chinese descent alone in the US, and 173,693 people of Chinese descent alone in Washington.

There are several months out of the year that have been statutorily dedicated in Washington to the commemoration of specified groups. In 2000 Washington declared May of each year to be Asian Pacific American Heritage Month. In 2019 the state declared June of each year to be LGBTQ Pride Month, and October of each year to be Filipino American History Month.

**Summary of Amended Bill:**

January of each year is designated as Chinese American/Americans of Chinese Descent History Month, dedicated as a time to commemorate the contributions by Chinese Americans and Americans of Chinese descent to the history and heritage of Washington. Public schools are encouraged to designate time for appropriate activities in commemoration of Chinese Americans and Americans of Chinese descent.

**Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill:**

The amended bill removes the designation of January as Americans of Chinese Descent History Month and instead designates January as Chinese American/Americans of Chinese Descent History Month.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

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

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) The act simply encourages, rather than requires, schools to teach kids about Washington's history which includes the history of Americans of Chinese descent. There have been inspirational stories and influence figures as part of Washington's history such as Bruce Lee and Governor Locke, but there have also been dark moments in the state's history such as the Tacoma Expulsions. Both need to be taught to the youth in the state so that the accomplishments and struggles of Chinese Americans are not forgotten.

Chinese American history is American history. The contributions of Chinese immigrants to this country date back to 1785, including helping to build the Northern Pacific Railroad in 1883 which ran from Minnesota to Washington. After the completion of the railroad, many Chinese immigrants worked in the construction and canning industry and moved north into Idaho and Washington. Of those who served in World War II, 22 percent were Chinese Americans. Chinese laborers also constructed the canal connecting Lake Union to Salmon Bay and Lake Washington. Chinese Americans have also contributed to this country as scientists who have made cutting-edge discoveries, distinguished architects and artists, and record-breaking athletes. In addition, since 1957, nine Chinese Americans have won the Nobel Prize.

Despite these contributions, Chinese Americans have experienced systemic discrimination and injustice. During the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, many Chinese

Americans were brutally killed, attacked, and expelled from many cities in the state. Chinese Americans have exhibited amazing resilience and tenacity in overcoming these challenges and unfair treatment in pursuit of their American dream. Dedicating a month to celebrating Americans of Chinese descent will help new immigrants to not fear reoccurrence of the past mistreatment towards Chinese Americans. It will honor the sacrifices, hard work, and accomplishments of the ancestors of Americans of Chinese descent and will educate children about the rich heritage of Chinese culture and contributions that helped shape the fabric of this state and the nation. The act will lead to a more diversified and inclusive future for all Americans.

The phrase "Americans of Chinese descent" is intentionally chosen because the country has seen an uptick of violence by Americans against Asian Americans in the recent years. This phrase is a reminder that we are Americans first. Being recognized as Americans contributes to the sense of belonging among the Chinese American population. Chinese Americans are the largest Asian minority group in the state, composing over 2 percent of the state's population.

Designating January as the month to celebrate the contributions of Americans of Chinese Descent is appropriate because it carries social, cultural, historical significance. This act does not require any additional costs which ensures no financial strain on taxpayers or the state.

Recognizing January as Americans of Chinese Descent History Month is important given today's climate. This act will bring attention to the public to right the wrongs done to Chinese Americans in the past and to help to stop the anti-Chinese problems in existence now. Passing this act will set an example for the whole nation.

This policy is long overdue. It has been introduced for three years. More than 1,000 people in Chinatown signed a petition in support of recognizing January as Americans of Chinese Descent History Month. The continued failure to pass this act in prior years have made some in the community feel as though the contributions of Chinese Americans are not worthy of recognition.

This act is beneficial for society to promote diversity in culture and understanding.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Senator Keith Wagoner, prime sponsor; Vivian Dong; Chu Chen; Yongsheng Sun; Lei Zhang; Linda Yang, Washington Asians For Equality; Kan Qiu, American Coalition for Equality; Wendy Yee; Jie Xie; Jimmy Ellie Jie; Shengquan Liang; and Yun Yun Xie.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.