
State Government & Tribal Relations Committee

HB 1759

Brief Description: Establishing Chinese American month.

Sponsors: Representatives Santos, Barnard, Robertson, Senn, Callan, Reed, Ormsby, Doglio, Duerr, Peterson and Pollet.

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| <p>Brief Summary of Bill</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Designates January of each year as Chinese American Month. |
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Hearing Date: 3/21/23

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 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

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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 with 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 of 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 Bill:

January of each year is designated as Chinese American Month and dedicated as a time for people to commemorate the contributions of Chinese Americans to the history and heritage of the state and the US. Public schools are encouraged to designate time for appropriate activities to commemorate Chinese American Month.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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