

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## ESB 5264

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

**Title:** An act relating to declaring January as Chinese American history month and encouraging public schools to commemorate the month.

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

**Sponsors:** Senators Wagoner, Brown, Conway, Das, Dhingra, Hasegawa, Honeyford, Kuderer, Lovelett, Pedersen, Rivers, Schoesler, Stanford, Warnick and Wilson, C..

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

State Government & Tribal Relations: 2/17/22, 2/21/22 [DP].

**Brief Summary of Engrossed Bill**

- Designates January of each year as Americans of Chinese Descent History Month.
- Encourages public schools to designate time for activities to commemorate the lives, history, achievements, and contributions of Americans of Chinese descent.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL RELATIONS

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Valdez, Chair; Lekanoff, Vice Chair; Volz, Ranking Minority Member; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Dolan, Graham and Gregerson.

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

**Background:**

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

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 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 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 United States and Washington. For example, 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 United States Navy purchased the Model C for use in World War I, which contributed to Boeing's first financial success.

According to analysis by the Pew Research Center of 2019 American Community Survey data, Chinese Americans are the largest Asian origin group in the United States (US), making up 24 percent of the Asian population, or 5.4 million people. Data from the 2010 US Census showed that Washington was home to 94,198 people who identify as Chinese alone and 113,144 people who identify as Chinese in combination with one or more race or ethnicity.

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.

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### **Summary of Bill:**

January of each year is declared Americans of Chinese Descent History Month and designated as a time to commemorate the contributions of Americans of Chinese descent to the history and heritage of Washington and the United States.

Public schools are encouraged to designate time for activities to commemorate the lives,

history, achievements, and contributions of Americans of Chinese descent.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on February 9, 2022.

**Effective Date:** 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 Chinese population is the fastest and largest growing Asian population in America. This bill provides an opportunity for schools to teach the history of Americans of Chinese descent including their great accomplishments and the trials they had to overcome because if you don't know your history, you don't know who you are. With this legislation, Washington will be the first state to honor Americans of Chinese descent in this manner.

People of Chinese descent have been victims of discrimination in American history and also currently. Many are aware of the Chinese Exclusion Act which suspended immigration of people from China. People of Chinese descent also endured expulsions, where more than 350 Chinese immigrants were forcefully removed from Seattle in the late 1880s. Warren Magnuson, a Congressman from Washington, championed the Magnuson Act which repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act.

Despite the challenges they faced, they made a lot of great contributions to American history and culture. Chinese people represented 90 percent of the laborers who built the Pacific Railroad, established California agriculture, fought during the American Civil War, and served in the U.S. Army during World War II. Washington is also the first state to have had a Governor of Chinese descent.

This bill is in the right step towards more inclusiveness. With the recent discriminatory rhetoric, there has been a rise in hate towards Chinese people in America. Americans should remember the Chinese Exclusion Act and the violent expulsions to avoid history from repeating itself.

This bill only requires public schools to teach the history of Americans of Chinese descent, but it should also encourage private schools to participate.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Senator Keith Wagoner, prime sponsor; Elaine Chen; Jimmy Yun; Linda Yang, Washington Asians For Equality; Kan Qiu, American Coalition for Equality; Kendall Kosai, Washington State Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs; Emily

Shi; and Nathan Qiu.

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