

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1516

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

Title: An act relating to lunar new year.

Brief Description: Making lunar new year a state legal holiday.

Sponsors: Representatives Thai, Caldier, Entenman, Harris, Farivar, Ryu, Goodman, Reed, Fey, Steele, Ormsby, Ortiz-Self, Hansen, Springer, Bronoske, Slatter, Walen, Wylie, Fitzgibbon, Sandlin, Lekanoff, Senn, Fosse, Doglio, Taylor, Kloba, Peterson, Cortes, Street, Simmons, Ramel, Duerr, Gregerson, Schmidt, Reeves, Pollet, Macri, Riccelli, Morgan and Bergquist.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government & Tribal Relations: 2/8/23, 2/15/23 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Designates the Lunar New Year as a state legal holiday to be observed on the day of the second new moon following the winter solstice, or on the day of the third new moon following the winter solstice if an intercalary month intervenes.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL RELATIONS

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Ramos, Chair; Stearns, Vice Chair; Abbarno, Ranking Minority Member; Christian, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Gregerson, Low and Mena.

Staff: Devon Mann (786-7290) and Desiree Omli (786-7105).

Background:

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.

The Lunar New Year.

Lunar New Year is a celebration of the arrival of spring and the beginning of a new year. Lunar New Year is a significant holiday in East and Southeast Asian cultures, including in Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean communities, among others. The beginning of Lunar New Year varies by year, as it is tied to the lunar calendar which is based on the cycles of the moon, and the duration of the holiday varies by culture. In the United States, Lunar New Year is commonly associated with the Chinese New Year, also known as the Spring Festival. This is typically a 15-day celebration beginning on the day of the second new moon after the winter solstice, which typically falls sometime between the end of January and mid-February. In Vietnam, the holiday is known as Tet Nguyen Dan, also commonly referred to as Tet, and in Korea it is known as Seollal.

In China, the holiday can be traced as far back as the Shang Dynasty (1600–1046 BCE) with its roots celebrating the end to the harvest and time to spend with family. Each culture celebrates the Lunar New Year differently with various foods and traditions that symbolize prosperity, abundance, and togetherness. Among other traditions, people give offerings to ancestors and deities, often in the form of food and money, and hang red lanterns to welcome health, wealth, and good fortune in the new year.

State Holidays.

Washington recognizes 11 specific days as paid state legal holidays: New Year's Day, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Presidents' Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Juneteenth, Labor Day, Veterans' Day, Thanksgiving Day, Native American Heritage Day, and Christmas Day. When a state legal holiday falls on a Saturday, the preceding Friday is the legal holiday. State legal holidays are also school holidays.

Another 17 specific days are recognized by the Legislature, but they are not considered legal holidays. Some of those days commemorate specific events, such as Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day. Other days commemorate groups of people, such as Korean-American Day, or certain ideas, such as Human Trafficking Awareness Day and Public Lands Day.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The day of the second new moon following the winter solstice, or the third new moon following the winter solstice should an intercalary month intervene, is designated as a state legal holiday in observance of the Lunar New Year.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill: (1) makes the first day of Lunar New Year the legal state holiday, rather than the Saturday before; and (2) requires that Lunar New Year be observed in accordance with current statutory requirements for the observance of holidays that fall on a weekend.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on February 15, 2023.

Effective Date of Substitute 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 Lunar New Year is a significant cultural holiday for many Asian Americans. The Asian American community is the fastest growing population in Washington and has made many contributions to the state. They helped build Washington and continue to contribute to its development in significant ways. Recognizing the Lunar New Year as a state holiday would respond to the recent rise in Asian hate by recognizing the Asian Americans in our community and helping them to feel like they belong. Local Lunar New Year celebrations across the state have been very popular and successful. Washington should follow California's example by making the Lunar New Year a state holiday.

The bill would be improved if the school holiday statute was amended to align with the state holiday statute provisions regarding the day of observance for holidays that fall on a weekend, which would help to ensure school districts correctly recognize state holidays.

(Opposed) The Lunar New Year is an important cultural tradition, so it is vital to celebrate it correctly. Recognizing the Lunar New Year on the Saturday before the actual holiday is culturally insensitive and harmful. Moving the date of the Lunar New Year with the lunar cycle is very important to the cultural significance and history of the holiday. Modifying the date diminishes the holiday and signifies that Asian American holidays are not as important as other cultural holidays. Washington should follow California's example by making the Lunar New Year a state holiday on the date of the actual holiday.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative My-Linh Thai, prime sponsor; Julie Salvi, Washington Education Association; Karin Mei Butler, Multicultural Association of Edmonds; Rongfen Burford; and Paul Charbonneau, City of Newcastle.

(Opposed) Yingju Ren; Linda Yang, Washington Asians For Equality; and Vivian Dong.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.