

Americans of Chinese Descent History Month Essay Competition

Title: Petition to the Washington State Legislature to establish January as Americans of Chinese Descent History Month

Background:

In 2019, the Washington State Legislature passed SB 5865, establishing October as Filipino American History Month. Inspired by this bill, Washington Asians for Equality and American Coalition for Equality advocated for a bill to establish a Chinese American History Month bill. In 2020, former Republican Senator from Lakewood, Steve O'Ban, sponsored a Senate Resolution, SR 8684, Honoring Chinese Americans. The Washington State Senate passed this resolution unanimously.

Encouraged by the passage of SR 8684, former Republican Senator Hans Zeiger from Puyallup, introduced SB 6679 in 2020, near the end of the legislative session, declaring January as Chinese American history month and encouraging public schools to commemorate the month. Due to time constraints, the bill did not move out of its original committee. However, SB 6679 had bipartisan co-sponsors.

In 2021, Senator Keith Wagoner reintroduced SB 6679 as SB 5264 for the 2021-2022 legislative session. SB 5264 passed the Senate State Government and Elections committee unanimously yet was stalled by Senate Democrat leadership. It missed the deadline to move out of the Senate in 2021. In a press release, WA Asians for Equality strongly condemned the Senate Democratic leadership for failing to support the Chinese American community and combating anti-Asian hate. This controversy was covered in the media by the Tacoma News Tribune and The Spokesman-Review in 2021, all during a time of dramatic increases in hate crimes against people of Asian descent nationally.

In 2022, the Washington State Senate quickly passed SB 5264. The bill passed the House State Government and Tribal Relations Committee unanimously and

was put on the House floor run list for a final floor vote. If passed, SB 5264 would have established January as Americans of Chinese Descent History Month.

However, in a final 36 hours of hyper-partisan behind the door political maneuvering, led by 41st Legislative District Democratic House Representative, My-Linh Thai, and 32nd Legislative Democratic House Representative Cindy Ryu, SB 5264 was blocked from getting a final floor vote. Sadly, Speaker Laurie Jinkins was aware of and allowed this anti-Chinese contingent in her caucus to kill the bill.

Related info:

- 2003 – The Washington State Legislature passed HB 1460 and established Japanese Remembrance Day;
- 2007 – The Washington State Legislature passed SB 5166 and established Korean American Day;
- Chinese American is the largest Asian ethnic group in Washington State.

Requirement:

Write a petition to the Washington State Legislature and urge them to establish January as Americans of Chinese Descent History Month.

Please address the following in the petition:

- 1) Why should Washington establish an Americans of Chinese Descent History Month?
- 2) Why should January be designated for commemorating Americans of Chinese Descent history? Rebut Rep. Cindy Ryu's claim questioning the significance of January as the right place for the designation during a period with other events like Martin Luther King Jr. Day, the opening of the Legislature, and the start of the new year in the Gregorian and lunar calendars.

- a. January 24, 1848, is the beginning of the Gold Rush, which attracted thousands of Chinese immigrants to the US;
 - b. Lunar New Year is the most significant holiday in Chinese tradition, and it often falls in January;
 - c. For public schools to commemorate Chinese American History Month, the designation period must be significantly meaningful to Chinese culture while schools are in session.
 - d. Any other supporting ideas;
- 3) Rebut Rep. My-Linh Thai's claim that passing SB 5264 was backward (see email below). Thai personally voted to pass SB 5865 and establish Filipino American History Month in 2019.

From: Thai, Rep. My-Linh <My-Linh.Thai@leg.wa.gov>
Sent: Thursday, March 3, 2022 10:07 AM
To: Chávez, Marissa <Marissa.Chavez@leg.wa.gov>
Subject: SB5264 - Please kindly forward to MOCC
Importance: High

Dear MOCC

I respectfully ask you to support us by voting NO to SB5264
We have worked long and hard to build a more inclusive community. Our Pacific Islanders family have been consistently being left out - left behind -
If we pass this - what happened to the Korean Americans, the Japanese Americans, the Vietnamese Americans, the Taiwanese Americans (to Rep. Santos's comment)
I can't say enough the backwardness of moving this legislation forward.

I was supposed to gather stakeholders to have this conversation over the interim. But I spent so much of my time working on HB1202. I weight the important of WHOLE over PART. Now, I ask you to be in solidarity with me.

Thank you

Representative My-Linh Thai (D-41st)
424 John L. O'Brien Building, Olympia WA 98504
Office (remote): 206-333-4107

House Majority Caucus Vice-Chair
Committees: Civil Rights and Judiciary - Housing, Human Services, Veterans - Finance
Caucus: Member of Color

- 4) Rebut House Speaker Laurie Jinkins claim that “the (Chinese American) history month bill (SB 5264) didn’t get a vote because majority Democrats had questions about assigning months to “sub-ethnic” groups.”
 - a. WA Legislature has done this in the past. ALL House Democrats, Laurie Jinkins, and My-Linh Thai voted to pass SB 5864 and designate October as Filipino American History Month.
- 5) Rebut Jinkins claim that SB 5264 lacked broad support.
 - a. Among the similar bills, SB 5264 was the only one CAPAA (state’s Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs) signed on to testify in support of. Commissioner Kendall Kosai of CAPAA gave a powerful speech in support of Chinese American History Month.
 - b. SB 5264 has the support of many of the state’s largest school districts. Seattle Public Schools, Bellevue School District, Lake Washington School District, and Tacoma Public Schools all supported SB 5264.
 - c. SB 5264 has the support of the League of Women Voters of Washington and the Jewish community. Both “The Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle” and “the JCRC of the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle” support this bill.
- 6) Rebut Jinkins claim that to establish a Chinese American History Month; the Chinese American community needs to get approval from all other racial and ethnic groups in the state in advance, something we are not aware of any other ethnic group having to do in advance.
 - a. When the Washington State Legislature passed Korean American Day and Filipino American History Month, they did not consult with the Chinese American community.
 - b. The Washington State legislature has never had such a high bar for passing a bill.
- 7) Rebut Rep. Cindy Ryu’s floor amendment to lump Chinese American History Month into the May AAPI month and effectively eliminate Chinese American History Month.
- 8) Rebut Rep. Cindy Ryu’s claim questioning the length of the designation and her attempt to shorten the recognition of Chinese Americans’ history from a month to a day or a week.

Essay competition participants are encouraged to do their research on the bills and the broad concept of Chinese Americans' history in the United States.