



CHRIS KAPENGA

WISCONSIN STATE SENATOR

AB 388 Testimony

Assembly Committee on Tourism

Thursday June 10, 2021

Thank you, Chairman Tranel and committee members, for hearing testimony on Assembly Bill 388 today. AB 388 establishes the Wisconsin commission for the United States semiquincentennial commission which will coordinate the commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States of America.

This bill was inspired by legislation passed by Congress creating the federal semiquincentennial commission and the nine other states have since created their own commissions. The goal of this commission is to plan and prepare events and opportunities to celebrate and educate people all over Wisconsin about the founding of the United States, and the role that Wisconsin has played throughout the 250 year history of our great nation!

The Wisconsin semiquincentennial commission would include bipartisan members from the legislature, the executive, and judicial branches, as well as representatives from the tribes, historical society, tourism industry, and patriotic history organizations. I look forward to celebrating this milestone for our nation and for the commission to get to work spreading the news and sharing the remarkable story of America.

Thank you to Speaker Vos for leading this initiative in the assembly, and thank you Chairman and Committee members, for your time and consideration of this bill. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.



**Assembly Committee on Tourism
June 10, 2021
Assembly Bill 388**

Chairman Tranel and committee members, my name is Chris Kolakowski. I am Director of the Wisconsin Veterans Museum, an educational activity of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs and a Smithsonian Affiliate since 2013. The mission of the Wisconsin Veteran Museum to acknowledge, commemorate, and affirm the role of Wisconsin veterans in the United States of America's military past and present.

Two and a half centuries ago, beginning in 1775, the United States began to take shape in the struggle to achieve independence from Great Britain. Starting then and going forward to this day, Americans have sought to define and structure this nation, and move toward what the Constitution called "a more perfect Union."

Why do I say 1775? Because the three senior-most armed services date from that year. The United States had an Army, Navy, and Marine Corps before it became an independent nation on July 4, 1776. It is important to recognize that fact and honor what those services, and the ones added later, have done, and still do, for the United States and Wisconsin to this day.

Wisconsin has a great opportunity to explore these important events and connect Wisconsinites with America's founding principles and events. The upcoming semiquincentennial (250th) Anniversaries of the Declaration of Independence, the American Revolutionary War, and other important events in our nation's founding present incredible opportunities for institutions and organizations around the country to engage and educate their communities. A National Commission, *America 250*, "aims to deepen understanding of our history, democratic process, and each other through education, increase engagement in our communities and governing affairs, and foster unity that includes the 'many' Americans in our 'one' nation."

Staff of the Wisconsin Veterans Museum have been engaged with America 250 as its efforts have taken shape. America 250 is encouraging states and territories to develop an interest in these important anniversaries, establish a state or territorial commission, and to sustain a relationship to America 250. Through that relationship with America 250, each state/territory stands to benefit from customized branding to highlight its distinct identity, significant federal funding and privately raised funds, tools and other resources to help with programming, and much more. In short, America 250 seeks to help place states/territories in a strong position to elevate their identity, drive economic activity, and increase community engagement during the Semiquincentennial.

Wisconsin would benefit greatly from establishing a State Semiquincentennial Commission to form a relationship with America 250 and coordinate and promote events and programming around the state during the anniversaries. While the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence will fall in 2026, anniversaries of Paul Revere's ride, the first battles of the American Revolutionary War, the formation of the American military, the convening of the Second Continental Congress, and more will come in 2025, less than five years from now.

While we strongly support the work of the national America 250 initiative, the Department is analyzing the fiscal impact of the bill, which appropriates no funds while providing that commission members may be reimbursed for travel expenses. We would prefer to see the bill have funding to support the commission and completion of its mission.

We agree on the need to get moving now, in order to allow institutions and organizations around the state adequate time to properly plan, prepare for, publicize, and carry out events and programming by the beginning of 2025. We look forward to working with legislators, partners, and stakeholders to make this a meaningful commemoration for all people of Wisconsin.

We are happy to address questions you may have.



TO: Assembly Committee on Tourism

FROM: Christian W. Overland, Director and CEO

RE: Testimony on Assembly Bill 388 Wisconsin's Commission for the United States Semiquincentennial

DATE: June 8, 2021

Thank you Chair Tranel, Vice Chair Swearingen, and Committee on Tourism members for holding this hearing on Assembly Bill 388. I want to express my appreciation for Speaker Vos and Senate President Kapenga for their interest in the significance of commemorating the United States Semiquincentennial in 2026 and moving this important bill forward

In 2020, the congressionally-appointed U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission published a report and plan for the commemoration of the 250th Anniversary of American independence. The commission outlined their vision in the report to lead a grassroots commemoration and the idea of having state and local history organizations drive and plan activities, events, and programs in their regions. Today the number of states that have already established 250th commissions now stands at fifteen including Alabama, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Nebraska, New Jersey, North Carolina, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, and West Virginia.

The Declaration of Independence, agreed to and signed by people on July 4, 1776, held visionary principles of equality, liberty and the pursuit of happiness and is our nation's greatest social innovation. The Wisconsin Historical Society has the first printing of the Declaration along with many thousands of other nationally significant artifacts, manuscript, and books in our North American History collection, which is the second largest American history collection in the world – with the Library of Congress being the largest. The Society, along with its more than 420 affiliated history museums and organizations representing 72 counties is

Collecting, Preserving and Sharing Stories Since 1846

816 State Street Madison, Wisconsin 53706

wisconsinhistory.org

looking forward to working with federal, tribal, state, local, private organizations, and our residents to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the of the United States. This national celebration of the founding of our nation is a once in a generation opportunity for us to engage our residents and educate our communities by sharing powerful stories of Wisconsin's role in the world's longest running democratic republic and the transformative moments in history that have shaped and defined the complexion and culture of our state and nation.

The Wisconsin Historical Society is ready to fully support Assembly Bill 388 and make Wisconsin the 16th state in our union to have a U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission that will engage our residents with the impactful and inspirational stories of our people and our nation so we can use history to build a better future together.



U.S. SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL COMMISSION

P.O. BOX 27840, WASHINGTON, D.C. 20038-7840 | (202) 478-3884 | america250.gov

Testimony in support of:
Assembly Bill 388, An Act Establishing The Wisconsin Commission For the United States Semiquincentennial

Submitted to:
The Wisconsin Assembly Committee on Tourism
June 10, 2021

Submitted by:
Daniel M. DiLella
Chairman
United States Semiquincentennial Commission

For Additional Information Contact:
Kelsey Millay
Director of State Programs
America250 Foundation
P.O. Box 27840
Washington, DC 20038-7840
kmillay@america250.org
202-478-3884

The U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission was established by Congress to inspire all Americans and each American to participate in the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States.

MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

- Senator Robert Casey of Pennsylvania
Senator Tom Cotton of Arkansas
Senator Ileana Ros-Lehtinen of Florida
Senator Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania
Rep. Robert Aderholt of Alabama
Rep. Dwight Evans of Pennsylvania
Rep. Maria Salazar of Florida
Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman of New Jersey

PRIVATE CITIZEN MEMBERS

- Robert Brady of Pennsylvania
David Cohen of Pennsylvania
Val Crofts of Wisconsin
Daniel DiLella of Pennsylvania (Chairman)
Cedric Dillipie of Arizona
Noah Griffin of California
Dr. Amy Gutmann of Pennsylvania

- Jim Koch of Massachusetts
Dr. Wilfred McClay of Oklahoma
Dr. Lucas Morel of Virginia
Robin Rice of California
James Swanson of Washington, DC
Richard Traubka of Maryland
Thomas Walker of Alabama

FEDERAL EX OFFICIO MEMBERS

- Gen. Lloyd J. Austin III, Secretary of Defense
Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of State
Luis G. Buelo III, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution
Dr. Miguel Cardona, Secretary of Education
Ann Eilers, Acting Chair of the National Endowment for the Arts
Merrick B. Garland, Attorney General
Crosby Kemper III, Director of the Institute of American Studies
Dale Hubbard, Secretary of the Interior
Dr. Carla Hayden, Director of the Library of Congress
Adem Walton, Acting Chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities

Chair Tranel, Vice-Chair Swearingen and Members of the Committee –

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony regarding Assembly Bill 388, which would create the Wisconsin Commission For the United States Semiquincentennial in order to plan and coordinate, within the state of Wisconsin, the commemoration of 250 years since the United States declared independence.

My name is Dan DiLella. I have the honor of serving as Chairman of the United States Semiquincentennial Commission, which was established by Congress to lead the nationwide commemoration of this historic anniversary and to inspire each and every American to participate in our country's greatest milestone yet.

The 250th anniversary of our nation's founding provides an unparalleled opportunity to reflect on the great American Experiment and to Educate, Engage, and Unite Americans throughout the country and our friends around the world. In anticipation of this milestone in 2026, the U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission will work with public and private entities across the country with the goal of orchestrating the largest and most inclusive anniversary observance in our nation's history.

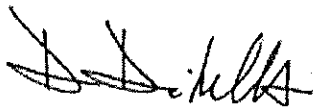
This initiative, which will be referred to commonly as "America250," anticipates nearly 125,000 programs—the vast majority of which will be led by states and territories—resulting in billions of dollars in resources that will ripple through our local, state, territorial, and national economies.

State- and territorial-level involvement is the Commission's top priority, and the Commission plans to work in full partnership with each state's official Semiquincentennial entity in order to support planning efforts across the country. Several states have already created Semiquincentennial entities to administer and organize their America250 programming, and many others are in the process of doing so. Through those commissions and their programs, states will be highlighting the contributions that they and their citizens have made to American history and culture since America's founding.

The Commission is encouraged to see that the Wisconsin legislature is considering Assembly Bill 388 to establish its own commission for participation in this once-in-a-lifetime commemoration.

The U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission stands ready to partner with you to achieve our shared goals over the next several years. We look forward to the establishment of Wisconsin's commission and to working with you—as we are with other states that have active commissions—to engage your citizens and to honor your state's unique story and contributions during this historic moment.

Sincerely,



Daniel M. DiLella
Chairman, U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission



ROBIN J. VOS

SPEAKER OF THE WISCONSIN STATE ASSEMBLY

Testimony on Assembly Bill 388
Assembly Committee on Tourism
June 10, 2021

Thank you Chair Tranel and members of the Assembly Committee on Tourism for holding a hearing today on Assembly Bill 388. This legislation creates a commission for the United States Semiquincentennial, highlighting the importance of the values that the United States was founded on and that have contributed to our country, as we know it today.

Our founding fathers established the United States with the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776. Our country will be celebrating its 250th anniversary in 2026. To commemorate this significant milestone, Congress passed legislation in 2016 creating the U.S. Semiquincentennial. Since then, more than a quarter of the states have proposed or established a 250th anniversary organization.

The formation of this commission will provide the opportunity for citizens across Wisconsin to be part of a national celebration of our country's founding. We need to remember the historic events that have occurred and honor the brave men and women who have stood up for the core values of our country that have allowed us the liberty and freedom we enjoy today.

Assembly Bill 388 creates a commission with a member makeup that is similar to the 100th Anniversary State Capitol Commemorative Commission. It would be responsible for the planning, preparing and implementing of programs and events that highlight the founding of the United States as well as the role and impact of Wisconsin in the nation's past, present and future.

Each state has the unique opportunity to invite its citizens, communities and local and state governments to join in celebrating the founding of our great country and the contributions our state has made to move our country forward.

I ask the committee to join me in supporting Assembly Bill 388 and celebrating this momentous occasion.