

Date of Hearing: April 23, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION

Blanca Rubio, Chair

AB 795 (Jeff Gonzalez) – As Amended April 1, 2025

**SUBJECT:** California Commission on the United States Semiquincentennial

**SUMMARY:** This bill would, until January 1, 2029, establish the California Commission on the United States Semiquincentennial (commission) to plan and coordinate commemorations and observances of the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence and the American Revolution. Specifically, **this bill**:

- 1) Establishes in state government the California Commission on the United States Semiquincentennial, to plan and coordinate commemorations and observances of the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence and the American Revolution.
- 2) Provides the commission shall operate as an independent advisory body supported entirely by private funding and in-kind contributions, with no direct fiscal impact on the General Fund.
- 3) Provides the commission shall consist of 16 members as follows:
  - a) The State Archivist, who shall serve as chairperson.
  - b) Two Members of the Assembly, appointed by the Speaker of the Assembly.
  - c) Two Members of the Senate, appointed by the Senate Committee on Rules.
  - d) Two members of the general public with experience in historical or cultural programming, appointed by the Governor.
  - e) Two members of the general public representing private sector sponsors, appointed by the State Archivist.
  - f) Two members of the general public representing California nonprofit organizations or community groups involved in cultural heritage or historical education, appointed by the Speaker of the Assembly and the Senate Committee on Rules, respectively.
  - g) Five members who shall be appointed by majority vote of the members appointed to the commission, as defined, whose primary responsibility shall be to raise the requisite funds for the commission.
- 4) Provides members shall serve without compensation but may be reimbursed for necessary expenses incurred in the performance of their duties provided that those reimbursements are funded through private donations.
- 5) States the commission shall have the following responsibilities:
  - a) Develop and promote educational programs, community events, and public exhibits commemorating the Semiquincentennial.
  - b) Facilitate partnerships with private entities, nonprofits, and local governments to support activities statewide.
  - c) Seek private and federal funding to finance its operations, including donations, grants and sponsorships.
  - d) Submit an annual report to the Legislature detailing activities, expenditures, and funding sources.

- e) The commission shall establish an online portal to ensure transparency and encourage public participation.
- 6) States the Semiquincentennial Fund is hereby created in the State Treasury to receive private contributions and federal grants. Funds in the Semiquincentennial Fund shall be available, upon appropriation by the Legislature, solely for the commission's activities. Specifies the Treasurer shall hold the Semiquincentennial Fund.
- 7) Provides the Controller shall oversee the fund's fiscal management and compliance with applicable laws and transparency requirements.
- 8) States the commission shall not transact any business or exercise its powers until the Controller has certified that there are sufficient funds in the Semiquincentennial Fund to support the commission's activities without requiring state financial resources.
- 9) Provides if the Controller determines that sufficient funds are not available by February 1, 2026, the commission shall be dissolved, and any remaining funds in the Semiquincentennial Fund shall be returned to contributors, on a pro rata basis, under procedures developed by the Controller in consultation with the Treasurer.
- 10) Provides on or before December 31, 2028, the commission shall transfer all records, files, and other historical materials to the State Archives for permanent preservation.
- 11) Includes a sunset day of January 1, 2029.
- 12) Makes various findings and declarations.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Establishes various commissions and boards within state government.
- 2) Establishes, at the federal level, the United States Semiquincentennial Commission to observe the 250th anniversary of the nation's founding.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** This bill is keyed fiscal by Legislative Counsel.

**COMMENTS:**

Purpose of the bill. According to the author's office, "After serving 21 years in the United States Marine Corps, I have developed a deep, personal appreciation for our nation and the strength of the American spirit. By establishing a California Commission on the United States Semiquincentennial to plan and coordinate commemorations of the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence and the American Revolution, we will highlight California's innovative progress and commitment to the American ideals, which have helped shape our nation. This an opportunity for us to come together as Americans in "a bipartisan way to celebrate 250 years of the outstanding achievements of the American People."

**Background.**

July 4, 2026, marks a momentous occasion for the United States—the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. This historic milestone stands as a tribute to the nation's journey,

celebrating its remarkable achievements and unwavering commitment to liberty, democracy, and self-governance.

The Semiquincentennial offers a chance for reflection, remembrance, and a renewed dedication to the principles that have shaped the country. Through educational programs, cultural exhibitions, community gatherings, and grand parades, July 4, 2026, will unite Americans in pride and gratitude, honoring the enduring spirit of America.

The United States Semiquincentennial Commission. The United States Semiquincentennial Commission is the Congressional body responsible for promoting and coordinating the United States Semiquincentennial. The commission was established under then-President Barack Obama in July 2016. Its purpose is to facilitate nationwide plans for observing this significant milestone in American history. The legislation specifically designates Boston, Philadelphia, Charleston, and New York City as locations of historical significance for organizing events. These cities will play a prominent role in the celebrations. The Act directs the U.S. Government to issue commemorative coins and postage stamps, as well as commission appropriately named naval vessels, in anticipation of the Semiquincentennial.

In 2018, the 33 nonpartisan members of the commission were sworn in at Independence Hall in Philadelphia, where both the United States Declaration of Independence and Constitution were deliberated and adopted. This marked the beginning of eight years of planning and organizing for the 250th national birthday celebration. The commission's work involves shaping the narrative around this historic anniversary on a national level, ensuring that the Semiquincentennial is commemorated in a meaningful and impactful way.

As part of the commemoration efforts established by the commission, each U.S. state and territory is expected to create or designate an official entity known as a "state 250th commission" to oversee the planning and programming for the Semiquincentennial. To date, more than 40 states have established state-level commissions to organize programs marking this historic milestone. These committees will play a crucial role in ensuring that the United States' 250th anniversary is celebrated in a meaningful and inclusive way.

In support. TNT Fireworks writes, "We recognize that large-scale commemorative efforts often raise concerns about funding, planning, and execution. This bill proactively addresses these concerns by ensuring the commission operates solely through private contributions and federal grants—without any state general fund dollars. This guarantees that California can play a meaningful role in the Semiquincentennial without placing any financial burden on the taxpayers. This bill provides a structured, transparent planning process that will engage key stakeholders, including business, nonprofits, educators, and local governments—to ensure that the Semiquincentennial celebrations are inclusive, well-organized, and reflective of California's diverse communities. By leveraging private sector involvement and historical expertise, this commission will ensure the state's participation in the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary is both fiscally responsible and deeply impactful."

Prior legislation. AB 3099 (Alvarez) of 2024. This bill would have established, until January 1, 2029, the California Commission on the United States Semiquincentennial to plan and coordinate commemorations and observances related to the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. (Assembly Appropriations Committee – Held under submission)

SB 1214 (Nguyen) of 2024. This bill would have established, until January 1, 2028, the California Commission on the United States Semiquincentennial to plan and coordinate commemorations and observances of the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence and American Revolution. (Assembly Appropriations Committee – Held under submission)

SB 6 (Nguyen) of 2023. This bill would have established the California Commission on the United States Semiquincentennial in state government to plan and coordinate commemorations and observances of the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the American Revolution. (Senate Appropriations Committee – Held under submission)

AB 1600 (Nguyen) of 2022. This bill would have established the California Commission on the United States Semiquincentennial in state government to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the founding of the United State of American, as specified. (Senate Appropriations Committee – Held under submission)

**REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:****Support**

TNT Fireworks

**Opposition**

None on file

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