



CHRIS KAPENGA

WISCONSIN STATE SENATOR

SB 390/AB 388 Testimony

Senate Committee on Agriculture and Tourism

Wednesday, October 6, 2021

Thank you, Chairwoman Ballweg and committee members, for hearing testimony on Senate Bill 390 and Assembly Bill 388 today. SB 390 and AB 388 establish 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.

These bills were inspired by legislation passed by Congress creating the federal semiquincentennial commission and the nine other states which 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.

Special thanks to Speaker Vos for leading this initiative in the assembly, and thank you Chairwoman Ballweg and Committee members, for your time and consideration of these bills. Please feel free to ask any questions.



ROBIN J. VOS

SPEAKER OF THE WISCONSIN STATE ASSEMBLY

Testimony on Senate Bill 390/Assembly Bill 388
Senate Committee on Agriculture and Tourism
October 6, 2021

Thank you Chair Ballweg and members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Tourism for holding a hearing today on Senate Bill 390 and 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 states have introduced or passed legislation or an executive order establishing a 250th anniversary organization.

The establishment 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 freedoms we enjoy today.

Senate Bill 390 and Assembly Bill 388 creates a commission with a member makeup that is similar to the 100th Anniversary State Capitol Commemorative Commission. The commission would be responsible for planning, preparing and implementing 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 state and local 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 Senate Bill 390 and Assembly Support 388 and celebrating this momentous occasion.



Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs

Tony Evers, Governor | Mary M. Kolar, Secretary

Senate Committee on Agriculture and Tourism

October 6, 2021

Senate Bill 390 and Assembly Bill 388

Chair Ballweg 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. The national recognition framework is taking shape: 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. The Commission further established the America 250 Foundation (*America250*) with the goals to deepen understanding of our history, democratic process, and each other through education, increase engagement in our communities and governing affairs, and foster unity.

Staff of the Wisconsin Veterans Museum previously engaged with America250 as its efforts have developed. America250 encourages states and territories establish a commission, develop an interest in these important anniversaries, and to sustain a relationship to America250. Through the relationship with America250, Wisconsin can receive federal and privately-raised funds, customized branding, plus tools and other resources to help with programming. In short, America250 seeks to help place states and 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 America250 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.

Nineteen states have thus far established commissions. Amercia250 has established 11 advisory councils and is embarking on seven different engagement initiatives. We are eager to see Wisconsin join the national network and formalize state activities that will 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 the Historical Society, legislators, partners, and stakeholders to make this a meaningful commemoration for all people of Wisconsin.

We are happy to address questions you may have.



DIANA SCHNEIDER

Senate Public Hearing
Committee on Agriculture & Tourism
Written Testimony on Senate Bill 390
Wednesday, October 6, 2021

RE: establishing the Wisconsin commission for the United States Semiquincentennial commission to coordinate the commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States.

Thank you Chair Ballweg and committee members for holding this hearing on Senate Bill 390. I want to express my appreciation for your interest in the significance of commemorating the United States Semiquincentennial in 2026 and moving this important bill forward. I also want to extend my personal support of this bill.

July 4, 2026, will mark 250 years since the United States of America declared its independence as a nation. 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. As this momentous anniversary approaches, Americans have an unparalleled opportunity to reflect on our past, to celebrate the rich tapestry of our present, and to advance the promise of our democracy for our future.

Congress has already established the U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission to lead the nationwide commemoration of this historic milestone, and programs for the commemoration of our country's 250th anniversary have begun across the nation. More than a third of the states have already formed their 250th organizations to promote themselves and work with America250, so I feel it is imperative that Wisconsin be part of that endeavor.

Joining this commemoration will give Wisconsin the opportunity to showcase our unique history and people. It has the potential of generating millions of dollars in revenue and driving tourism to us from within the U.S. and from around the globe. It will also offer us the potential to provide significant civic involvement with resulting public relations benefits for Wisconsin. These celebrations will engage our residents and educate our communities by sharing stories that highlight Wisconsin's contributions and role in the history that has shaped and defined the complexion and culture of our state and nation.

These celebratory events will consider the full scope of American history, from the pre-revolutionary era to today. They will engage tribal nations and organizations, states, territories, and communities across the country, as well as millions of friends worldwide and focus on the themes of inviting and involving all Americans. They will imagine and inspire our future, include several national signature programs, and spark more than 100,000 grassroots programs across the country. Powerful, impactful, and inspirational stories of our people and our nation will be shared for all to see how history can be used to build a better future. In addition, they will attract billions of dollars in resources to local, state, territorial, and national economies.

This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. America's 250th anniversary affords each of us the chance to be a part of history as we celebrate what will likely be the most exhilarating patriotic observance of our lifetimes. And it provides an exceptional opportunity for community involvement and positive public relations. Therefore, I feel Wisconsin needs to create our organization as soon as possible so we can become part of this momentous event.

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. As stated in the American's Creed, our "American patriots sacrificed their lives and fortunes" to establish our country "upon those principles of freedom, equality, justice and humanity." Because of their many and great sacrifices, because of the cultural and financial benefits to Wisconsin, and because I am a proud and patriotic American, I strongly and wholeheartedly support and encourage the passage of this bill which will make Wisconsin a part of the Semiquincentennial Commission, established by the Congress of the United States.

Sincerely,



Diana Schneider