

SUBJECT: Designating March as Texas History Month

COMMITTEE: State Cultural and Recreational Resources — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 5 ayes — Hilderbran, Geren, B. Cook, Kuempel, Phillips
0 nays
2 absent — Bailey, Dukes

WITNESSES: For — Randy Billingsley, Virginia Vancleave and Daughters of the Republic of Texas; Charles M. Yates, Texian Legacy Association and Jan DeVault
Against — None
On — *Registered but did not testify:* J.P. Bryan, Terry Collen, John Nau, and Larry Oaks, Texas Historical Commission; Peggy Rudd and Edward Seidenberg, State Library and Archives Commission

DIGEST: HB 294 would amend the Government Code to designate March as Texas History Month in honor of Texans who helped shape the state’s history and to recognize events significant to that history. The bill would require regularly observed celebrations and activities in public schools and elsewhere to promote interest in and knowledge of Texas history.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2003.

SUPPORTERS SAY: The people and events that comprise Texas history are worth celebrating. A strong sense of identity traditionally has transcended Texans’ differences and has served to unite Texas citizens. Ensuring that young Texans learn and appreciate the state’s history and heritage becomes even more critical as the state’s population continues to expand.

March has special significance to Texas history, beginning with March 2, 1836, when representatives at Washington-on-the-Brazos voted unanimously

to declare Texas' independence from Mexico. March 2 also is the anniversary of Sam Houston's birth in 1793. On March 6, 1836, William Barrett Travis and the garrison under his command died at the Battle of the Alamo. Other interesting historical events preceding the Texas revolution occurred during the month of March.

Texas has more than 450 years of written history. Designating an entire month to encourage celebrations about and recognition of this history would focus attention on the subject. Academic studies during the month of March could help to highlight other significant dates in Texas history, such as San Jacinto Day on April 21.

An outstanding description of Texans' sense of state pride comes from John Steinbeck, a non-Texan: "I have said that Texas is a state of mind, but I think it is more than that. It is a mystique closely approximating a religion....For all its enormous range of space, climate, and physical appearance, and for all the internal squabbles, contentions, and strivings, Texas has a tight cohesiveness perhaps stronger than any other section of America." HB 294 would ensure that this pride in Texas' culture, history, and inclusiveness is celebrated appropriately and is recognized by activities in public schools.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

Although recognizing Texas history is important, HB 294 is unnecessary. The Government Code already designates many days significant to Texas history: Sam Rayburn Day, January 6; State of Texas Anniversary Remembrance Day, February 19; Texas Independence Day and Texas Flag Day, March 2; San Jacinto Day, April 21; Emancipation Day in Texas, June 19; Lyndon Baines Johnson Day, August 27; and Father of Texas Day, November 3. The code names July as Buffalo Soldiers Heritage Month in honor of their contribution to Texas' history.

NOTES:

The companion bill, SB 250 by Barrientos, was reported favorably by the Senate State Affairs Committee on March 11 and recommended for the Local and Uncontested Calendar.