



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Illinois America 250 Commission invites all Illinoisans to celebrate nation's 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary leading up to July 4, 2026**

SPRINGFIELD – Preparations are underway for Illinois to join in the nation's celebration of 250 years of independence in 2026, and the [Illinois America 250 Commission](#) is encouraging people across the Prairie State to get involved in planning festivities and educational opportunities to mark the historic moment.

Celebrations marking the nation's independence are expected to take place across the country in 2026, culminating on July 4 of that year.

"Illinois is integral to telling our nation's story, from our rich agricultural and manufacturing roots to our role in the fight for freedom and justice," **said Governor JB Pritzker**. "As we commemorate 250 years of independence, the Illinois America 250 Commission will help ensure every Illinoisan has a voice and a place in this historic moment."

"The 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary is not just a celebration of our past. It's an opportunity to examine how we ended up where we are today and an invitation to consider the future we want to build," **said Gabrielle Lyon, chair of the Illinois America 250 Commission** and executive director of Illinois Humanities. "It's thrilling to see the range of plans taking shape. In every corner of the state, people are excited to lift up undertold stories, build civic pride, and involve their communities in shaping the next chapter of America's story."

The Illinois America 250 Commission is encouraging communities, libraries, schools, historical societies, cultural institutions, and individuals of all ages to be part of efforts to develop an inclusive commemoration of the founding of the United States and Illinois' vital role in the nation's history and development.

"The Illinois America 250 Commission is made up of a bipartisan group of individuals who have come together to uplift the vital role our state has had within our nation's history," **said State Senator Doris Turner** (D-Springfield). "History is living, breathing and ever-evolving. It's important that we bring to light the untold stories of Illinois."

The Commission is focused on four areas in anticipation of the July 4, 2026, anniversary:

- Creating opportunities that engage diverse youth statewide and foster relationships between young people and elected officials.
- Encouraging and supporting counties, cities, towns, and municipalities to commemorate the 250<sup>th</sup> accessibly and inclusively.
- Identifying unique cultural assets and place-based visitor experiences for residents and visitors alike to showcase the Illinois' role in our country's complex legacy.
- Gathering educational resources that enable young people, students, and life-long learners of all ages to explore and engage with the meaning of the anniversary.

Over the coming months, the Commission will host outreach and listening sessions to encourage residents from all corners of Illinois to explore the diversity, strength, and resilience that make Illinois central to America. Visit the [Commission's website](#) and follow it on social media for updates and opportunities to get involved.

"The Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the Illinois State Museum, and state historic sites are proud to be part of plans to celebrate the nation's 250<sup>th</sup> birthday," said **Natalie Phelps Finnie, director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources**. "We look forward to welcoming visitors to Illinois state parks, museums, and historic sites as they contemplate our nation's past and its future."

"As we prepare to celebrate 250 years alongside the Illinois America 250 Commission, DCEO and the Office of Tourism will continue to highlight the unique stories and rich diversity that make Illinois an essential part of America's past, present and future," said **Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) Director Kristin Richards**. "As Illinois' world-class tourism industry achieves record-breaking successes, this monumental occasion provides an opportunity to invite people, from near and far, to discover what makes Illinois a cornerstone of our nation's story."

Civic involvement will be key to Illinois' participation in the national 250<sup>th</sup> celebration, said **Brad Cole, chief executive officer of the Illinois Municipal League** and a member of the Illinois America 250 Commission.

"Local elected officials and community organizations across the state will play a central role in commemorating our first 250 years through special events, ceremonies and other engaging opportunities for this once-in-a-lifetime anniversary," Cole said.

Youth involvement also is critical because Generation Z – today's young adults – will guide the nation into its next chapter, said **Kayla Pilgrim**, one of 100 members of the [Made by Us Youth250 Bureau](#).

"Commemorating America's 250<sup>th</sup> is not only about reflecting on our past. It's also an opportunity to amplify young voices and ensure they have a role in shaping the future of our country," Pilgrim, 19, of Berwyn said. "Illinois youth bring valuable ideas and energy that are essential to building a stronger and more inclusive America."

The Illinois America 250 Commission is also focused on representing Tribal nations in the observance. **Dorene Wiese, president of the American Indian Association of Illinois** and a member of the Commission, said remembering and documenting history is crucial for the country and noted that the creation of the United States involved the colonization, dehumanization, and displacement of American Indian people, leading to oppression and significant loss of life, land, and cultural practices.

Today, Illinois has the 10<sup>th</sup> largest American Indian population of any state, with representatives of more than 100 different tribes present.

"We call for a reflective approach to Independence Day celebrations, urging Americans to acknowledge the resilience and contributions of American Indian people. It encourages honoring those referred to as 'merciless Indian Savages' in the Declaration, recognizing their enduring presence and influence in the nation's history," Wiese said.

The Illinois America 250 Commission comprises appointees from Native and tribal organizations, arts and humanities organizations including museums and libraries, and the civic and business sectors. It was created by the Illinois America Commission Act with the task of fostering an inclusive statewide celebration that highlights Illinois' unique contributions to the nation's history and explores the many perspectives that shape its legacy.

The Commission aims to create spaces for dialogue, learning, and celebration across all communities in Illinois, emphasizing the state's vibrant cultural heritage and its continuing role in America's story and amplifying community-driven initiatives that highlight the contributions of Illinoisans from all walks of life.

**ABOUT ILLINOIS AMERICA 250**

For more information on the Illinois America 250 Commission and to learn how communities can participate in planning and events, visit the [Illinois America 250 website](#). Social media users can connect on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [LinkedIn](#).

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