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Birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and George Washington: Fact Sheet

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Introduction

Washington's Birthday, often informally referred to as Presidents' Day, is a federal holiday celebrating the birth of President George Washington on the third Monday in February. In some regions of the United States, the birth of President Abraham Lincoln is also unofficially celebrated on this holiday. The official designation for this holiday is "Washington's Birthday." Although other institutions such as state and local governments and private businesses may use other names, it is federal policy to always refer to holidays by the names designated in the law.

This guide assists congressional offices with work related to these events. It contains links to legislation, CRS reports, sample speeches and remarks from the *Congressional Record*, and presidential proclamations and remarks. It also contains links to selected historical and cultural resources.

History

Observances of the birth of President George Washington (February 22, 1732) began long before the creation of an official holiday. In February 1832, Congress established a Joint Committee to arrange for national parades, orations, and festivals in commemoration of the centennial of President Washington's birth, and adjourned from February 21 through February 23 of that year out of respect for his memory. An additional tradition was created on the 130th anniversary of Washington's birth when his farewell address was read in a joint session of Congress, a tradition that continues in the Senate each year.

However, Washington's birthday was not formally made a legal holiday until January 31, 1879, when February 22 was declared a holiday for federal employees in the District of Columbia. The commemoration of the holiday was shifted from February 22 to the third Monday in February by the passage of the Uniform Monday Holiday Act, or "Monday Holiday Law," in 1968.

Arguments have been made to alter the holiday to include commemoration of President Abraham Lincoln in some way, and several states recognize the holiday as "Washington and Lincoln's Birthday," or "Presidents' Day." Bills have also been introduced in Congress requesting that the President issue a proclamation each year recognizing the anniversary of the birth of President Lincoln. However, the federal holiday has officially remained Washington's Birthday.

Legislation

H.R. 75 (110th Congress), Washington-Lincoln Recognition Act of 2007, January 4, 2007.

H.R. 43 (109th Congress), Washington-Lincoln Recognition Act of 2005, January 4, 2005.

P.L. 90-363 (90th Congress), To provide for uniform annual observances of certain legal public holidays on Mondays, and for other purposes, June 27, 1968.

CRS Reports

CRS Report R41990, *Federal Holidays: Evolution and Current Practices*, by Jacob R. Straus

Sample Congressional Speeches and Recognitions

Members of Congress often make floor statements, issue press releases, or enter Extensions of Remarks into the *Congressional Record* to recognize federal holidays and observances. The following are some recent examples that may be of assistance in preparing such statements:

Washington

Senator Patrick Leahy, “Reading of Washington’s Farewell Address,” remarks in the Senate *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 168 (February, 28, 2022), pp. S811-S815. [Video]

Senator Rob Portman, “Reading of Washington’s Farewell Address,” remarks in the Senate *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 167 (February 22, 2021), pp. S751-S755. [Video]

Senator Tammy Baldwin, “Reading of Washington’s Farewell Address,” remarks in the Senate *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 166 (February 24, 2020), pp. S1091-S1095. [Video]

Senator Deb Fischer, “Reading of Washington’s Farewell Address,” remarks in the Senate *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 165 (February 25, 2019), pp. S1405-S1409. [Video]

Senator Gary Peters, “Reading of Washington’s Farewell Address,” remarks in the Senate *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 164 (February 26, 2018), pp. S1199-S1203. [Video]

Senator Ben Sasse, “Reading of Washington’s Farewell Address,” remarks in the Senate, *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 163 (February 27, 2017), pp. S1424-S1428. [Video]

Senator Chris Coons, “Reading of Washington’s Farewell Address,” remarks in the Senate, *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 162 (February 22, 2016), pp. S889-S893. [Video]

Senator John Hoeven, “Reading of Washington’s Farewell Address,” remarks in the Senate, *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 161 (February 23, 2015), pp. S1017-S1022. [Video]

Senator Angus King, “Reading of Washington’s Farewell Address,” remarks in the Senate, *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 160 (February 24, 2014), pp. S973-S978. [Video]

Lincoln

Representative Larry Bucshon, “Honoring President Abraham Lincoln,” *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 168 (February 7, 2022), p.H980-H981.

Representative Randy Hultgren, “Remembering President Lincoln,” *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 161 (February 12, 2015), p. H990.

Senator Richard Durbin, “Celebrating the 206th Anniversary of President Abraham Lincoln’s Birthday,” *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 161 (February 12, 2015), pp. S977-S978.

Senator Richard Durbin, “Lincoln’s Farewell Speech,” *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 157 (February 10, 2011), p. S641.

Representatives Stephen Lynch, Jason Chaffetz, Philip Hare, Sheila Jackson Lee, Jan Schakowsky, Jerry Costello, and Mike Pence, “Commemorating Abraham Lincoln on the Bicentennial of his Birth,” *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 155 (February 12, 2009), pp. H1269-H1272.

Presidential Proclamations and Remarks

One of the many uses of a presidential proclamation or presidential remarks is to ceremoniously honor a group or call attention to certain issues or events. Some remarks and proclamations commemorating the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and George Washington from the *Compilation of Presidential Documents* include the following:

Washington

Remarks Honoring President George Washington's 275th Birthday in Mount Vernon, Virginia—President George W. Bush, February 19, 2007. [Video]

Proclamation—275th Anniversary of the Birth of George Washington—President George W. Bush, February 16, 2007.

Proclamation—Bicentennial Commemoration of the Death of George Washington—President William J. Clinton, December 17, 1999.

Lincoln

Proclamation—Day of Remembrance for President Abraham Lincoln—President Barack Obama, April 17, 2015.

Proclamation—150th Anniversary of the Inauguration of Abraham Lincoln—President Barack Obama, March 4, 2011.

Remarks at a Lincoln Bicentennial Celebration—President Barack Obama, February 12, 2009. [Video]

Remarks at the Abraham Lincoln Association Banquet in Springfield, Illinois—President Barack Obama, February 12, 2009. [Video]

Remarks Honoring President Abraham Lincoln's 199th Birthday—President George W. Bush, February 10, 2008. [Video]

Historical and Cultural Resources

Numerous government resources provide information on the history and culture of Abraham Lincoln's and George Washington's birthdays. Some of these include the following:

The Library of Congress, "The Abraham Lincoln Papers"

The collection is organized into three "General Correspondence" series, which include incoming and outgoing correspondence and enclosures, drafts of speeches, and notes and printed material. Includes approximately 20,000 documents.

The National Park Service, "The Lincoln Home Page"

Provides historical information, quotes, writings and links to Lincoln places, associations, and websites.

The Library of Congress, "The George Washington Papers"

This is the largest collection of original Washington documents in the world. Document types in the collection as a whole include correspondence, letter-books, commonplace books, diaries, journals, financial account books, military records, reports, and notes accumulated by Washington

from 1741 through 1799. The collection is organized into eight series or groupings. Includes approximately 65,000 documents.

GovInfo, “Presidents’ Day”

This webpage details the history of the holiday and its celebration of George Washington’s birthday and the American presidency. It includes links to GovInfo document collections related to U.S. Presidents.

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