

**ILLINOIS AMERICA 250 COMMISSION**  
**COMMISSION MEETING**  
**July 15, 2024, 1:00 p.m.**

**Webex Meeting**

**Attending: Officer:** Chair Gabrielle (Gabe) Lyon; **Commission Members:** Brad Cole, Michelle Donahoe, Jenn Edginton, Jessica Harris, Sara Phalen, Jacki Rand, Gerald Savage, Dick Simpson, Amber Smock, Andy Van Meter, and Nikki Williams Rucker; **Department of Natural Resources staff:** Meghan Lindstrom; one member of the public: Madeline Cruz.

**I. Welcome**

Chair Gabe Lyon called the meeting to order at 1:04 p.m.

**II. Roll Call**

Meghan Lindstrom called the roll and a quorum was present.

**III. Review June 17 Commission Meeting Minutes**

The Minutes from the June 17 meeting for approval. Sara Phalen moved to approve the Minutes, Gerald Savage seconded, and the Minutes were approved unanimously.

**IV. Chair's Update**

Gabe reported on her trip with Michelle Donahoe to the national America250 conference. The Commission viewed the "Our American Story" video that had been shared at the conference and Gabe invited the commissioners to share their impressions. Amber Smock commented that the America250 website was not up to accessibility standards and any video posted online should have embedded captions. She recommended that the official Illinois America250 be at double A level accessibility per the web content accessibility check guidelines. Dick Simpson recommended the Commission hire a firm to create a version of the video focused on Illinois. Gabe recommended that was being considered by the Marketing Working Group.

Gabe shared more of the discussion topics covered at the conference. Many other organizations recognized the complicated undertaking of commemorating the 250th anniversary. Common topics included to 'reset and refresh our national narrative' and uplifting stories that had been buried. Some states have been preparing for the 250th for several years and could serve as examples for Illinois to follow.

Sara asked if the partnership with the national America250 tied the Commission to certain themes or terms or if it was a straight collaboration. Gabe confirmed the relationship was collaborative and the partnership did not restrain the work of the Commission in any way. National America250 had created three avenues for directly supporting 250 efforts: hiring a PR and social media firm, creating a funding directory that state and territory organizations could apply to for funding for projects, and three “Tent Pole Programs”.

Michelle reported on the “Tent Pole Programs”. First was “America's Field Trip”, last run in the spring, where students competed in essay, art, or video form to describe what America meant to them. The winners chose between fifteen possible field trips as a reward, including visiting the Statue of Liberty or hiking in the Rocky Mountains with a guide from the National Park Service. There will be an opportunity in the future for organizations to offer their own field trips as possible rewards. The second program was “Our American Story”, which is an effort to create a compilation of oral histories. National America250 will release more details about the program in the future. Third was “America Gives”, which encourages public service and volunteer work. Those who complete 100 hours of volunteer work are awarded a certificate.

Gabe shared the results of a public sentiment survey commissioned by national America250 which had over 1000 respondents. Only 33% of them were aware of the upcoming 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary and Generation Z was the least engaged. Respondents wanted America250 to have elements of both commemoration and celebration. The most resonant theme was “The US has come a long way, and we still have a long way to go.” Programs voted most likely to engage the public were student field trips, oral histories, and concerts/songbooks. Programs voted 'middle' engagement were art exhibits, innovation expos, tours of sites, museum exhibitions, and sporting events. The lowest ranked programs were lectures and historical reenactments. The survey also noted that Midwesterners were “especially interested in teaching children about America's history and guiding values”. Based on the survey national America250 recommended states focus on history, unity, reflecting on the past, accessibility, and safety.

Gabe recommended the Commission utilize the information provided by the survey to determine how to reach the greatest number of people and align with their expectations for the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Michelle recommended the Commission consider the work shared at the conference by the Pennsylvania and Wisconsin America 250 organizations. Pennsylvania has established partnerships in every county, is working at the municipal level, and has developed a very active school program and toolkits. Wisconsin has developed a “Two Lights for Tomorrow” event to commemorate the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Paul Revere’s famous ride, followed by a day of service. There will be opportunities for regional collaboration with Wisconsin and the greater Midwest area.

Brad Cole recommended the Commission find ways to work with state and national entities, such as the Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution. He also recommended the Commemoration Working Group consider creating a postage stamp for the anniversary. Michelle reported that the Girl Scouts of America had mentioned the creation of a commemorative coin and that they along with representatives from the YMCA recommended that states work with the local representatives of their organizations.

Gabe recommended the Commission consider creating a caucus in Illinois, make formal partnerships with similar organizations in neighboring states, and create a list of statewide entities the Commission could work with to promote the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Sara recommended the Commission consider their audience and how to make the largest impact with the time constraints. She referred them to the enabling statute for the Commission and how intentional it was about inclusion.

Jacki Rand encouraged that the Commission consider narrowing their focus. She recommended they focus on education and teaching students, with particular emphasis on including Native histories, and to focus on the founding and creation of the federal government. She further cautioned the Commission to be aware of the ongoing tension and political considerations that can affect the teaching of history.

**V. Working Groups goals for the summer**

Gabe shared a slide of the four working groups, their goals, and their members.

Gabe recommended the working groups each plan out a timeline from September 2024 to June 2025 of goals that can be feasibly completed with minimal funding or without any supplemental budget. She recommended the

working groups consider advisory members, resonant themes, potential deliverables, metrics/outcomes, and anticipated expenses.

**VI. Public Comment**

None given.

**VII. Adjournment**

Jacki moved to end the meeting, Jessica Harris seconded, and the meeting was ended at 2:25 p.m.