



**AMERICA'S SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL COMMITTEE**  
**April 8, 2026**  
**Room 1228/1327 of the Legislative Building**

The America's Semiquincentennial Committee meets on Wednesday, April 8, 2026 at 2:00 PM. The meeting was held in Room 1228/1327 of the Legislative Building. Members present were: Senator Alexander, Representative Blackwell, Mr. Luebke, Mr. Luker, Hon. Neely, and Ms. Wallace.

Representative Hugh Blackwell, Co-Chair, presiding, called the meeting to order and introduced the Sergeant at Arms: David Leighton, Thomas Terry, Linda Matthews, and Mike Norton.

Upon Representative Blackwell's motion, which was seconded by Mr. Luebke, the minutes from the February 11, 2026, meeting were approved by a voice vote.

Representative Blackwell introduced Associate Justice Trey Allen of the North Carolina Supreme Court to give a presentation entitled The North Carolina 1776 Constitution.  
**(Attachment 1)**

Justice Allen thanks the Committee for inviting him to speak and introduced three of his staff members attending the meeting with him: his law clerk, Anna Wakeling, and interns, Taylor Grieves and Nia Endow.

Justice Allen began his presentation by noting that this year is the 250th birthday of the State of North Carolina and when British rule ended, the people of North Carolina knew they would need to replace that rule with some kind of government. He notes that given that he is not a professional historian, he approached this presentation from his perspective as a judge and would primarily discuss provisions in the 1776 NC Constitution that are relevant to his work as an Associate Justice on the NC Supreme Court.

Justice Allen provides a timeline of key events leading up to the adoption of the first North Carolina Constitution. The Battle of Moores Creek Bridge in February of 1776 marked the end of British Rule in the Colony of North Carolina which led to the 4th Provincial Congress in Halifax to approve the Halifax Resolves on April 12, 1776. The Halifax Resolves represented the first occasion with which one of the colonies instructed its delegates to the Continental Congress to vote in support of independence. Following the Declaration of Independence, delegates were elected to the 5th provincial Congress which met in Halifax to author and adopt a constitution for the state. On December 17, 1776, they adopted a Declaration of Rights which contains many provisions that resemble those in the Bill of Rights.

Justice Allen emphasizes that the framers of the first state constitution included individual liberties as a centerpiece of their work by adopting the Declaration of Rights before the State Constitution. On December 18, 1776, they adopted the first state constitution, which laid out the

structure of state government and included a provision that expressly incorporated the Declaration of Rights. The Declaration of Rights has remained a part of the NC Constitution ever since and is located in Article I of the document today.

Justice Allen points out some of the ways in which the Halifax Resolves are commemorated in North Carolina, including the State Flag, the First in Freedom license plates, and a plaque in Halifax, NC located where the building once stood and where the Halifax Resolves were signed.

Justice Allen references an article published in 1992 by Professor John Orth of UNC Chapel Hill which he notes is a bit dated, but provides great information regarding the history of the State Constitution and its appendix traces the history of some of the provisions in the Declaration of Rights, some of which date back to the 1689 English Bill of Rights. He discusses several of these enumerated rights including those related to criminal proceedings, property rights, taxation, freedom of press, assembly, and worship, and the right to bear arms.

Justice Allen points out that the first North Carolina State Constitution was unique in that it was expressly a philosophical document. It established that political power was vested and derived from the people. It also prohibited the suspension of laws, provided for free elections, banned standing armies, and established the separation of powers within the state government. He notes that the motivation for choosing explicit language rather than implied rights was the result of overbearing and overreaching royal governors during the colonial period.

Justice Allen goes on to discuss the governmental structure provided for in the first constitution noting that while the separation of powers between the branches of government was central to the structure, the preponderance of authority was granted to the Legislature. As it remains today, the Legislature was bicameral with a Senate and House of Commons that had annual elections in which representation was based on counties. There was one senator and two house members from each county. Additionally, six towns within the state had their own representative. Legislators and voters were to be residents, property owners, and free men meeting those requirements to vote as long as they paid their taxes. Justice Allen notes that there was not a racial qualification for voting in the original state constitution despite the institution of slavery, but in 1835 the State Constitution was amended to prevent African Americans from voting.

He shares that the General Assembly was given the power to appoint the Governor, the members of the Council of State, all judges, and all officers in the militia. Therefore, the phrase separation of powers primarily meant that no individuals could be part of more than one branch of government simultaneously. He goes on to share that the Governor's powers were limited and he was required to consult the Council of State on all decisions of importance. Those powers included serving as the Captain General and Commander in Chief of the militia, which he could dispatch for public safety during the General Assembly's recess; spending money in accordance with the General Assembly's instructions; and laying embargoes or prohibiting exports of commodities, granting pardons and reprieves, and filling vacant offices on a temporary basis. However, all of these decisions had to be made in consultation with the Council of State.

Next, Justice Allen notes the significance of the state's commitment to public education in the first constitution, which required that there be one or more schools established by the Legislature for which the school master's salary would be paid for by the state.

Justice Allen next addresses what he characterizes as the most important case decided by the North Carolina courts, *Bayard v. Singleton*, which established the principle that the state constitution was the supreme law in the state and a court may refuse to follow a law that violates the state constitution. This, he notes, is of particular significance as it predated the establishment

of judicial review by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Marbury v. Madison* by around 16 years. He explains that while this concept may seem obvious to us now, it was very much not obvious at the time, given the framers' experience with the British legal system, in which courts cannot strike down acts of parliament. Additionally, the case created a conflict between the Legislature and the judiciary, which was a risk for the courts as the Legislature appointed all of the judges at the time.

Justice Allen concludes his presentation by asking if there are any questions from the Committee. Representative Blackwell recognizes Hon. Neely for a question.

Hon. Neely asks how long the drafting committee met. Justice Allen shares that he believes they met for several weeks, but as there is not a surviving journal of the first constitutional convention, he cannot be sure. He adds that Judge Samuel Ashe was on the drafting committee, and he was also one of the judges that decided *Bayard v. Singleton*.

Hon. Neely asks if the committee took any instruction or advice. Justice Allen shares that there was a request to John Adams, who was regarded as an authority on state constitutional law, and he provided some input that the drafting committee found valuable.

Representative Blackwell shares that several of the Committee members visited the State Archives vault just before the meeting and were shown a letter from John Adams, which was in response to John Penn who was one of the signers of the U.S. Constitution from North Carolina. In the letter, Representative Blackwell explains, Penn had requested Adams' advice on what should be included in the state constitution, and Adams provided a list of suggestions.

Department of Labor Commissioner, Luke Farley, asks if the phrase Justice Allen referenced "by and with the advice of the Council of State," meant that the consent of the Council of State was required. Justice Allen states that he would refrain from answering.

Representative Blackwell thanks Justice Allen for his presentation and recognizes Dr. Kickler regarding the approval of the 2026 Committee Report. **(Attachment 2)** Dr. Kickler shares that the draft report was submitted to the Committee before the last scheduled meeting and will be delivered to the General Assembly to update the body on the Committee's work.

Representative Blackwell asks for questions from the Committee regarding the draft report. Seeing none, he asks for a motion on the report. Hon. Neely makes a motion for approval of the Committee Report. Seeing no further discussion, Representative Blackwell calls for a voice vote. The motion carries.

Representative Blackwell recognizes Commissioner Farley to provide an update on the July 4th Parade. Commissioner Farley thanks the Chairs for allowing him to speak and commends Justice Allen's presentation. Commissioner Farley shares that he can confirm that the parade is officially scheduled for July 4th at 9:30AM in downtown Raleigh. He thanks the General Assembly for their support noting that the parade would not be happening if not for their support. Commissioner Farley adds that he serves on the board of the Celebrate America Foundation (CAF) which has led to his involvement with the parade. He notes that a parade is the traditional method for celebrating the Fourth of July and CAF determined several months ago that there was a need for such a parade to celebrate the semiquincentennial. He goes on to share that there are a few things that are left to be planned, but he believes the route will likely start around the General Assembly and travel down Salisbury Street before turning left to pass the Capitol Building and then travel down Fayetteville Street. He shares that the vision for the parade is to be a grand and patriotic celebration of America, the biggest and best since the bicentennial. He

also notes that the Foundation plans to make the parade a celebration of North Carolina's role in America's Freedom as well.

Commissioner Farley goes on to encourage those who are able to visit Historic Halifax to see the Halifax Resolves, which are currently on loan to the state from the National Archives for the first time in 250 years. He shares that the Council of State held its regular meeting in Halifax on April 7th in celebration of the Halifax Resolves.

Finally, Commissioner Farley shares with the Committee that the CAF is working to secure Christina Koch, the Artemis astronaut and North Carolina native from Onslow, as the Grand Marshall for the parade. A formal invitation has not been made yet, as she is still on mission. He notes that this announcement should provide a sense of the kind of parade that the Foundation is preparing. Commissioner Farley plans to attend the next committee meeting and provide additional details at that time. He again thanks the General Assembly for its support.

Representative Blackwell thanks Commissioner Farley for those updates on the parade and for his energy and vision. Representative Blackwell then recognizes Mike Leonard for an update on the Overmountain Victory Trail.

Mr. Leonard begins by commenting on the Bayard case that Justice Allen discussed during his presentation and notes the connections between that case and the Revolution, as it was a case in which two patriot attorneys represented a Tory whose property had been seized unconstitutionally, and they won. He then shares that he has been in touch with the Department of Cultural and Natural Resources (DNCR), and the NC Land and Water Fund has agreed to provide funds to clear a portion of the Overmountain Victory Trail in McDowell County that currently has a number of trees downed across it as a result of Hurricane Helene. Mr. Leonard shares that he does not yet have a timeline for when the section will be cleared.

Additionally, Mr. Leonard shares that Forsyth County is planning an event on August 7th and 8th involving the Race to the Dan, which will include presentations from the Head of Military History at West Point and a History Professor at the Virginia Military Institute. He will provide an invitation to the event at a later date.

Finally, Mr. Leonard shares that Wilson Library at UNC Chapel Hill will be joining with the History Museum on a 250th display, as the History Museum is currently closed for renovations. He believes it is set to open in June.

Representative Blackwell thanks Mr. Leonard for the updates and his continued efforts. He recognizes Dr. Kickler to introduce the speakers joining the meeting via Webex to share an update on the July 3rd concert in High Point, NC.

Dr. Kickler introduces David Briggs, former Director of the High Point Theatre, and Brian Meixner, Executive Director and Music Director for the NC Brass Band, to provide information about the concert program and the venue.

Mr. Briggs shares that the concert will take place on July 3rd at 7:30 PM in the High Point Theatre located at 220 East Commerce Avenue in High Point, NC. The seating capacity of the auditorium is approximately 900, and free parking is available around the theatre. The venue will begin to be set up on July 1st, including the installation of a video wall which will display videos that the CAF and General Assembly have created during the production. Mr. Briggs shares that there will be a rehearsal alongside NC Public Television, with the goal of providing a live broadcast of the performance on July 3rd. Mr. Briggs shares that the concert is free and open to

the public with general admission seating, but 200 seats will be reserved for VIPs, and a reception for VIP guests is scheduled to be held preceding the performance. The concert is scheduled to run for at least 90 minutes with a 15-minute intermission and will include performances by Darin and Brooke Aldridge, the North Carolina Brass Band, and the North Carolina Baptist Choir.

Mr. Meixner thanks the Committee and Members of the General Assembly, along with Dr. Kickler, for their support and leadership. He shares that the NC Brass Band is a fully professional ensemble that just celebrated its 11th anniversary. They perform primarily in the Triad, but they travel across the state as well.

He shares that the program will begin with the presentation of colors by a local honor guard, which will be followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and the "Star-Spangled Banner." He notes that there will be a few speakers and video presentations celebrating the history of North Carolina and that the concert will be a nice combination of celebrating the patriotic music of the United States of America and the musical heritage and culture of North Carolina. He shares that the Brass Band will be performing a few patriotic marches as well as "The Old North State," the official state song, and "North Carolina is My Home," which was written by Charles Kuralt, who is a famous North Carolinian, and it is recognized as an unofficial state song.

The second portion of the program will be opened by the bluegrass ensemble to celebrate the genre native to North Carolina. Additionally, there will be an opportunity to recognize the veterans and current military personnel with an armed forces medley which will include all of the service tunes. Additionally, the Baptist Choir will join the Brass Band in a performance of "America the Beautiful" and "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" amongst a couple of other patriotic works, and the concert will conclude with a performance of "The Stars and Stripes Forever."

Representative Blackwell thanks Mr. Meixner for his presentation and recognizes Dr. Kickler to discuss publication opportunities. Dr. Kickler shares that some committee members and former speakers have submitted articles that will be forwarded to the North State Journal on April 9th. Dr. Kickler encourages members to write a column about the 250th in general or about a particular event or anniversary that he will then forward along.

Representative Blackwell recognizes Dr. Kickler to provide an update on Freedom 250. Dr. Kickler shares that approximately a month ago, a Freedom 250 truck was in Raleigh. It also stopped in Fort Bragg and other locations across the state, but it was in Raleigh for 22 days. Dr. Kickler explains that there are six Freedom trucks that provide traveling museum exhibits, many of which are interactive. He adds that he is working to get another Freedom truck in North Carolina in a few months.

Representative Blackwell recognizes Juan Pleitez to provide an update from the Celebrate America Foundation. Mr. Pleitez thanks the Chairs and Committee for allowing him the honor and opportunity to play a role in these events. He also thanks Maria Lord of Representative Blackwell's Office and Dr. Kickler for their time and assistance with these projects. Mr. Pleitez refers back to the comments made on the upcoming parade and concert and notes that he plans to provide more updates at the next committee meeting.

Representative Blackwell recognizes Anne Evangelista of DNCR to provide updates. Ms. Evangelista provides updates on several projects and initiatives. She shares that at the end of February DNCR's America 250 NC Staff participated in the 250th anniversary of the Battle of Moores Creek Bridge at the First in Freedom Festival where they were able to engage with

thousands of people over the course of the three-day event. Additionally, she and the staff of the Division of Research and Publications met in March to discuss the Historical Highway Marker Program and Revolutionary War era markers to be added at the request of some of the committee members. Also in March, Tryon Palace hosted the First Oval Office Project exhibit in New Bern, which included a reproduction of General George Washington's mobile headquarters during the Revolutionary War as well as an encampment reproduction. She shares that images of the exhibit are available on Tryon Palace's website.

Ms. Evangelista shares that DNCR is publishing a book entitled *A Chronology of the American Revolution in North Carolina*. **(Attachment 3)** The publication includes a list of dates in which North Carolina had an impact on the War in a national and international context. The book was written by Michael Coffey, who is an employee of DNCR and a research historian. Additionally, she shares that alongside the Sons of the American Revolution, the America 250 team has been able to retain the North Carolina Brigade sketch to be displayed across the state in celebration of the 250th starting in May. The Sketch will be available to be viewed first at the State Capitol before traveling to the NC Museum of Art, Tryon Palace, and finally Historic Halifax.

Ms. Evangelista thanks Commissioner Farley for mentioning Halifax days, which took place last weekend, during which the new visitor center opened following the Council of State meeting. The original Halifax Resolves are there for viewing in the Visitor Center until October 6th. She added that there will be a formal ceremony in Halifax to celebrate the 250th of Halifax on Sunday, April 12th, at 3:00 PM. She goes on to mention the NC Symphony's Patriotic Pop Series, which is scheduled to begin on April 16th at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, NC, before traveling around the state.

Additionally, Ms. Evangelista shares about the North Carolina The Beautiful initiative through America 250 NC, which is sponsoring statewide cleanups that will also start in April at various state parks and in local communities. She then thanks Mr. Leonard for sharing about the Witnesses to the Revolution Exhibit that is scheduled to open to the public on June 12th at the Wilson Library at UNC Chapel Hill. Finally, she shares that she has been working with the American Legion, military partners, the Raleigh Concert Band, and Raleigh historic sites to prepare for the Capitol 250 North Carolina Freedom Fest on July 4th, following the parade. **(Attachment 4)** Living historians, musical performers, food vendors, food trucks, and exhibitors are slated to be on the Capitol grounds. She will have more information at the next committee meeting regarding this event. Ms. Evangelista provided an additional attachment regarding a project by Mosaic NC. **(Attachment 5)**

Representative Blackwell recognizes Senator Alexander for a comment. Senator Alexander expresses his appreciation for the tour of the State Archives Building.

Representative Blackwell recognizes Mr. David McCracken of the Raleigh Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution to provide an update on his work. Mr. McCracken thanks the Committee for the statement of commendation. He shares that all of the mannequins have been acquired for the display on the Capitol grounds on the Fourth of July, as well as the clothing for the women and children mannequins. He adds that the North Carolina period uniforms are still in production and are being made by a gentleman in Greensboro.

Mr. McCracken shares that he visited the Freedom 250 truck when it was traveling the state and he and his spouse found it to be very well done. He encouraged everyone to visit it if they can. Additionally, Mr. McCracken shares that Governor Stein will be inducted into the Raleigh Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution on Sunday, April 12th, in Halifax as a part of the festivities there.

Finally, Mr. McCracken references the two handouts that he distributed to the Committee. **(Attachments 6-7)** One of the handouts addresses an event scheduled for Monday, May 18th, which will feature a film by Mr. David Garrigus, who previously presented to the Committee, The American Constitution. He shares that it is a free event, but they hope those attending will be so impressed with the event that they choose to donate to the NC Brigade. Additionally, he mentions they will have some of the mannequins in the room during the event and Mr. Garrigus and Dr. George Van Cleave will take questions at the end of the show.

Representative Blackwell thanks Mr. McCracken for his comments and recognizes Mr. Luker to provide an update on his project in Charlotte. Mr. Luker shares that the American Revolution Augmented Reality exhibit opens this Sunday, April 12th, beginning at 4:00 PM. The exhibit will run for the remainder of the year. In addition to the exhibit, some artifacts from the Kings Mountain Battlefield will be on display, as well as some items from Historic Brattonsville in South Carolina. The exhibit is over 9,000 square feet on the first floor of the museum, and there will be several different programs along with it including travel to Kings Mountain and other locations in the Charlotte area via bus tours and hikes, as well as speaking engagements in the Mecklenburg, Gaston, and Union counties and the greater Charlotte region.

Representative Blackwell recognizes Dr. Kickler. Dr. Kickler shares that he has placed another order of the 250th pocket Constitutions that will be published within two weeks, which will reflect Mr. Daws as a member of the Committee. Additionally, he notes that he will be reaching out to Members of the General Assembly in the coming weeks, asking them to record a one-minute video about the founding of America, the 250th, and what that means to them. Those videos will be uploaded to the committee website once they are complete. Finally, he shares that, per Hon. Neely's suggestion, he will be reaching out to various groups across the state that might be planning to or are interested in hosting readings of the Declaration of Independence. He plans to compile a list of those planned events and encourage the groups that do not have a reading planned to do so.

Representative Blackwell recognizes Ms. Wallace for a question. Ms. Wallace asks if the July 4th celebration in Raleigh will include a fireworks display or a light show. Several members of the public address the question, including Mr. Pleitez and Ms. Evangelista, who share that there will be a fireworks show put on by the City of Raleigh that can be viewed in Dix Park.

Mr. Luker is recognized for a final comment. Mr. Luker expresses his appreciation to DNCR for their help with his exhibit as well. He shares that they provided a reproduction of the Guilford Courthouse Flag from the state collection.

There being no further business, the meeting stands adjourned at 3:10 PM.

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Representative Hugh Blackwell, Co-Chair  
Presiding

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Brooke Mason-Preddy, Committee Clerk