



AMERICA'S SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL COMMITTEE
Thursday, May 21, 2026
Room 1228/1327 of the Legislative Building

The America's Semiquincentennial Committee meets on Thursday, May 21, 2026, at 2:00 PM. The meeting is held in Room 1228/1327 of the Legislative Building. Members present are: Senator W. Ted Alexander, Mr. Kyle J. Luebke (W), Mr. Jason E. Luker, Hon. Charles Batcheller Neely, and Ms. Tanzy Barrow Wallace.

Senator W. Ted Alexander, Co-Chair, presiding, calls the meeting to order and thanks those present for their attendance.

Senator Alexander shares several historical events that took place on this day including:

- The era of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence and North Carolina's transition from protest to self government began 251 years ago following the Declaration's signing on May 20, 1775.
- On May 20, 1834, the Marquis de Lafayette passed away.
- In 1781, the State was experiencing the aftermath of the Battle of Guilford Courthouse.
- The American Red Cross was organized by Clara Barton on May 21, 1881.
- In 1927, Charles Lindbergh landed in Paris from the first solo transatlantic flight.
- In 1955, the first transcontinental solo flight was completed.
- In 1776, Richard Henry Lee and Francis Lightfoot Lee expressed strong support for independence which signaled growing momentum within Congress toward breaking from Britain.

Hon. Neely comments that the support for independence occurred in the wake of the Halifax Resolves being signed which these individuals would have received word of shortly before offering their support. He suggests that the Halifax Resolves inspired these men.

Senator Alexander notes that earlier in the week the NC Senate was visited by the great nephew of Wilbur and Orville Wright.

Senator Alexander introduces and thanks the Sergeant at Arms: from the House, David Leighton, Thomas Terry, and Stafford Young, and from the Senate, Terry Barnhardt and Keith Whitfield.

Senator Alexander shares that Representative Blackwell is unable to attend the meeting due to budget negotiations.

Upon Hon. Neely's motion, the minutes from the April 8, 2026, meeting are approved by a voice vote. **(Attachment 1)**

Senator Alexander draws the committee members' attention to the various handouts that were distributed on their desks prior to the meeting and shares that he believes they will be addressed

by the various speakers and members of the public that will be recognized to speak during the meeting. **(Attachments 2-8)**

Senator Alexander introduces Michael Noriega, Chief of Outreach for the American Journey Experience, to speak about their traveling exhibit displayed on the third floor of the Legislative Building and he encourages everyone to visit the exhibit before it closes. He also encourages everyone to visit the kiosk that was installed on the third floor last month by the American Battlefield Trust and notes that a similar kiosk has been installed at all eleven visitor centers in North Carolina.

Michael Noriega thanks the Chairman and addresses the Committee. He shares that he is joined by American Journey Experiences partners from the Pro-family Legislative Network with the goal of reminding visitors what it is that makes America exceptional. He goes on to describe the U.S. as the most free, benevolent, and prosperous nation on Earth, noting that although the U.S. accounts for only 4% of the world's population, it manages to generate 24% of the world's GDP, and that the U.S. out paces other nations in charitable giving, surpassing the second most charitable nation, the UK, by over 10 billion dollars a year. Mr. Noriega also shares that America lays claim to more inventions and discoveries than the rest of the world combined.

He goes on to state that while the 250th anniversary of the nation's birth is cause for celebration it is also a time to re-dedicate ourselves to the foundational principles of the nation that allowed it to prosper. He shares that when the Declaration of Independence was being drafted, Thomas Jefferson said that the idea was not to generate new principles or arguments never before thought of or say things that had never been said before, but rather to share with mankind the common sense of the subject, such as the idea that "all men are created equal," the principle of government authority residing with the people, and that the only purpose of government is to be the proper custodian of God-given rights. He notes that these were not new ideas, but it was the first time these ideas were enshrined in a political philosophy.

Mr. Noriega emphasizes that freedom has always come at a cost and references that weeks before the Battle of Lexington and Concord, patriots gathered to determine what they were to do and Dr. Joseph Warren who was present said, "Our country is in danger, but not to be despaired of...On you depend the fortunes of America. You are to decide the important question, on which rest the happiness and liberty of millions yet unborn. Act worthy of yourselves." Two weeks after making this statement, Dr. Warren told Paul Revere that he needed to ride through the night to warn Lexington that the British were coming.

He notes that freedom is still expensive today and this political experiment is still revolutionary. Now more than ever before, it is imperative that we guard the principles of freedom that this nation was built on. He says we are at a shifting point in our nation's history as many no longer see the giants of our history as heroes, but rather they are vilified for things they did not even do.

He shares that their exhibit includes historic artifacts gathered by their organization which was established in 2020 by radio host, Glenn Beck, and historian, David Barton. Beck and Barton set out to gather 100,000 artifacts that would represent the highs and lows of our nation's history. Mr. Noriega expresses that for over 250 years it has been understood that, as President Andrew Jackson stated, "the Bible is the rock upon which the American public rests." He shares that the artifacts include a 1599 Geneva Bible, which is the same type that was used by the Pilgrims in Plymouth. He shares that these ideas, when brought to fruition, have brought liberty and justice to millions of Americans. He shares that we can only determine where we are to go as a nation by looking to our foundation.

Mr. Noriega shares that one of the artifacts in their collection is a lock of George Washington's hair collected at his death. He goes on to state that while George Washington was seen as a hero and immortalized for his sacrifices for the ideal of American freedom, the current generation of students sometimes express hesitation in referring to our founding fathers as heroes, rather they associate those historical figures with racism and hypocrisy. He states that students are told that the ideals that are found in the Declaration of Independence were meant to apply only to white male land owners rather than everyone in the aggregate and he suggests this could not be further from the truth which is why, he says, it is important for everyone to take this opportunity to become students of history. The first draft of the Declaration of Independence is another artifact included in the American Journey Experience exhibit. It was found by Thomas Jefferson's grandson in 1828, two years after Jefferson's death, while going through his belongings to locate items of importance and historical significance. This draft was the product of the 'Committee of Five,' which included Adams, Livingston, Sherman, Franklin, and Jefferson. He shares that the copies of the document were made using acid to transfer the ink to different pieces of paper. These copies were distributed to the members of the committee allowing each member was able to make changes and additions to the document. The draft in their exhibit includes notations from Franklin and Adams and does not yet include the word unanimous due to a sentence on page 3 that addresses the King's opposition to the colonial efforts to alter or restrain the institution of slavery noting the juxtaposition between the institution and the King's religion. Mr. Noriega suggests that this part of the history of the Declaration of Independence is not being taught, but that it should be as it demonstrates that Thomas Jefferson did not support the institution of slavery and he goes on to note that only South Carolina and Georgia opposed the inclusion of this sentence.

Mr. Noriega shares that their goal going into America 250 is not to condemn the ideas of the revolution or those that gave so much for us to be free, but rather to determine what can be done to make America a more perfect union by better understanding the principles of the American Revolution. As the founding fathers' understood that the country would never be perfect, but they thought that a foundation on religion and morality were indispensable supports to society. He expresses that the American Journey Experience is honored to be a part of America 250 in North Carolina and in partnering with the state to re-dedicate to the principles of the American Revolution. He shares that as he has traveled the country he has seen many Americans across the political spectrum who see issues and injustices happening currently in the country that they do not wish future generation to face and they ask themselves what they can do to make a difference. Mr. Noriega suggests that the way to ensure America remains a great nation is by acting as if the issue of freedom depends on each of us alone and by passing legislation that advances freedom and truth for generations to come. Finally, Mr. Noriega thanks the Committee for inviting the American Journey Experience to display their exhibit and allowing him to speak.

Senator Alexander thanks Mr. Noriega for his inspiring message and again encourages everyone to visit the exhibit.

Senator Alexander recognizes Dr. Kickler to provide an update on the parade. Dr. Kickler shares that he met with Commissioner Farley last week and progress is being made on the parade preparations. He directs the committee members to the parade flyer that was distributed via email and in the meeting materials. **(Attachment 2)** He encourages members to use the fliers to spread the word about the parade and notes that they are welcome to make copies of the fliers to distribute. Dr. Kickler shares that he has heard the parade being advertised on G105 and had heard from others that it is being advertised on other radio stations as well.

Dr. Kickler adds that Mr. David McCracken, who gave a presentation to the Committee on the NC Brigade replica wagon at a previous meeting, is continuing to work on the wagon and hopes

to be able to include it in the 250th celebration at the State Capitol. Additionally, he shares that the Committee's letter of commendation helped in the process significantly with fundraising efforts.

Senator Alexander recognizes Stephen McKee, President of the NC Sons of the American Revolution, to provide an update on this and any other matter relevant to the Committee's work. Mr. McKee confirms that the Raleigh Chapter is on track to have the wagon ready to be a part of the encampment display at the 250th celebration at the State Capitol. He also shares that he is working to confirm the catering contract, PBS filming contract, and other details for the VIP reception and concert at the High Point Theatre.

Senator Alexander recognizes David Briggs, former director of High Point Theatre, to provide any additional updates on the preparations for the concert. He shares that he is working with NCGA staff on the videos that will be played during the concert and that a site visit is planned for the coming week with NC Public Television. He shares that tickets are available and anyone can reserve up to four tickets by visiting highpointtheatre.com. He explains that the concert will last approximately 90-120 minutes with an intermission.

Senator Alexander reiterates that tickets to the concert are free and any one can reserve up to four tickets in advance by visiting highpointtheatre.com or CAF.us. He also shares that it is their understanding that NC PBS will be recording the concert to be broadcast at a later date. He again expresses his excitement for the program and the inclusion of Darin and Brooke Aldridge in the program due to their success in the Bluegrass charts.

Senator Alexander thanks Mr. McKee and Mr. Briggs for their comments and commends NC PBS for their work and collaboration on the concert. He then recognizes Dr. Kickler who shares that High Point Theatre has added the concert to the upcoming events on their website and he has already heard from several people that they have already reserved their tickets. He directs committee members and the public to take a look at the two flyers regarding the event that were distributed. **(Attachments 3-4)**

Dr. Kickler goes on to share that Duplin Winery is creating a limited release sweet red muscadine wine, titled America 250, for which proceeds will benefit the Celebrate America Foundation. The wine is scheduled to be bottled in mid-June.

Dr. Kickler also shares that new copies of the 250th celebratory edition of the US and State Constitutions produced by the General Assembly which includes the committee's membership and a special introduction. He adds that this version is updated to include Mr. Daws as a member of the Committee. Dr. Kickler encourages the members of the Committee to pick up copies and distribute them.

Senator Alexander moves on to the next item on the agenda: Publication Materials. Dr. Kickler shares that the North State Journal has published two columns from previous speakers/presenters to the Committee and they are looking for more columns. He adds that the columns should be about 700 words in length to increase the likelihood that they will be published.

Dr. Kickler goes on to share that the Sons of the American Revolution's showing of the American Constitution film that was advertised to the Committee at its last meeting took place the Tuesday prior to this meeting. He shares that there are additional opportunities to view the film across the state and he will share information about those showings with the Committee should they wish to attend. He encourages committee members to attend one of the viewings as film includes leading national historians and political scientists of note.

Dr. Kickler adds that the kiosk installed by the American Battlefield Trust on the 3rd floor of the Legislative Building is still available for viewing and he reminds the Committee and those listening that there are also kiosks in every North Carolina Visitor Center as well. He encourages everyone to visit it as well as the American Journey Experience exhibit following the meeting.

Senator Alexander shares with the Committee that he, alongside Dr. Kickler and NC Department of Transportation (DOT), has been working on a bill to create a special license plate for the Semiquincentennial. Senator Alexander recognizes his intern, Peter Rantala, who created the license plate mock up that he is presenting to the Committee. **(Attachment 5)** Senator Alexander emphasizes that this image is a suggestion and it is using generic images rather than actual visuals of locations in North Carolina, but it is meant to give an idea of the layout of the license plate and what content should be included. He asks that the committee members look over the mock up and share their suggestions.

Ms. Wallace suggests adding more of the beaches on the coastline around the lighthouse rather than pine trees. She says it is a wonderful concept.

Dr. Kickler encourages conversation from the Committee, asking for their thoughts on the use of colors and the inclusion of 1776-2026 and the America 250 logo.

Hon. Neely shares that he loves the colors and dates, but that he would like the topography to be a bit more representative of North Carolina's topography and praises Peter for his work.

Mr. Luker adds that he likes the layout and agrees that the items pointed out earlier are good ideas for improvement. He also believes that the Wright Flyer included may be a later model than the one that was a part of the first flight at Kitty Hawk, NC, so that may be a consideration when it comes to improvements. Otherwise, he shares that he likes the layout, dates, and he thinks it would look good on a car and easy to see.

Mr. Luebke shares that he loves the layout and he only has positive things to add. He expresses that he finds the dates to be a very important inclusion on the plate and he adds that he loves the contract in colors on the plate, especially the pop of red in the cardinal. He thinks the cardinal should remain a part of the design no matter what other changes are made.

Senator Alexander adds that he thinks the state flag over the capitol should be turned the opposite direction in the final version. He notes that the final version will also have to comport with DOT regulations and requirements for reflectivity and color.

Dr. Kickler shares that the goal is to provide a final draft to DOT by the first week of June so it can be ready and rolled out on July 1st.

Senator Alexander shares that the NC Senate plans to hold one of their sessions in the Capitol Building and adds that it will be more of a ceremonial session and will be held before July 4th. He believes they may be working with Stephen McKee and others regarding what will be taking place during that session.

Senator Alexander praises and thanks the Committee for its work as all of the things being discussed and are finally coming to fruition are the result of their ideas and feedback over the past year and a half.

Dr. Kickler is recognized to discuss opportunities for Committee outreach. He asks the committee members to share with him any instances when they are representing the Committee at a reenactment, lecture, or hosting an event themselves related to the Semiquincentennial so that he can keep a log which can be included in the Committee's report to the General Assembly regarding their work.

Senator Alexander summarizes the requests thus far of the committee members including writing articles for publication, assistance publicizing upcoming events, attending upcoming events, and additional feedback on the license plate design.

Senator Alexander asks if any of the committee members would like to bring up any other business before moving on to public comment.

Senator Alexander recognizes Anne Evangelista with the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR) to share updates with the Committee. She discusses a recent reception hosted by DNCR in the Capitol Building in which the original North Carolina Brigade Sketch was displayed and the Museum of the American Revolution's curator, Matthew Skic, spoke. She adds that the Sketch is on display until August 1st at the North Carolina Museum of Art (NCMA), after which it will be traveling to Tryon Palace where it will be on display until October, after which it will make its final stop in Historic Halifax. She encourages everyone to go see it.

Senator Alexander adds that the reception was an outstanding event with a great speaker.

Ms. Evangelista thanks the Senator for his comments. She adds that the Knowing the West special exhibit has also opened at the NCMA which is the museum's America 250 celebration showcasing pieces by native and non-native artists that represent perceptions of the American West and it will be open through August 9th.

Next, she shares that DNCR's America 250 staff will be at The Soccer Tournament in Cary, NC on May 27th with living historians and their airstream set up to interact with spectators at the Tournament. She adds that the living historians may be a part of the Tournament festivities as well.

Ms. Evangelista reminds the Committee that the Witnesses to the American Revolution exhibit at Wilson Library at UNC Chapel Hill will open on June 12th and is a cooperation between the North Carolina Museum of History and UNC Chapel Hill and DNCR Secretary Pamela Brewington Cashwell will be speaking at the event.

She goes on to share that the NC Symphony's Patriotic Pops concerts have been a great success and very popular with those in attendance. She notes that there are four more shows in June which will take place in Tarboro (6/9), Tryon Palace (6/11), Jacksonville (6/16), and Chapel Hill (6/18).

Finally, Ms. Evangelista shares information about the plans for the Capitol 250 North Carolina Freedom Fest scheduled for 10 AM-4PM on July 4th, in Raleigh, NC. **(Attachment 6)** The event will include live music, 50+ vendors and special exhibitors, food trucks, living historians, and a formal ceremony. Other state departments and agencies will be taking part in the celebrations including the Department of Adult Corrections, the Division of Motor Vehicles, the Auditor's Office, the Insurance Commissioner's Office, the Department of Commerce, the Treasurer's Office, the Office of State Human Resources, the Department of Transportation, and the Department of Information Technology, as well as several DNCR divisions including the aquariums, the Arts Council, the Library, the Parks, Museum of History, the Zoo, regional

history museums, the Museum of Natural Sciences, some state historic sites, and the Office of State Archaeology.

In collaboration with the City of Raleigh, Historic Raleigh Trolley Tours will be available on July 4th and will follow a route starting at the Capitol and looping through Historic Raleigh. Live musicians will include main stage performances from the 82nd Airborne's All-American Brass Quintet, the Governor's School Choir, the Wake and District Raleigh Pipe Band, Poet Zach Zachary, and the Nest of Singing Birds Ballad Singers. Rissi Palmer and Tift Merritt will be headlining the event.

The Carolina Hurricanes will be hosting a kids zone on the west side of the Capitol Grounds. The Capitol Building will be open as well with programming inside. Ms. Evangelista shares the event web address: America250.NC.gov/FreedomFest which includes a full schedule of events.

Ms. Evangelista adds that the America 250 staff has been and will continue to attend all of the Carolina Hurricanes games and playoff games to promote America 250 and interacting with the public to draw attention and increase interest. During this week's games America 250 promotions and Fourth of July content will be shown.

Senator Alexander thanks Ms. Evangelista for her work and updates and expresses his excitement for the activities and plans for the Fourth of July. He then recognizes Mike Leonard with the Conservation Fund to speak to the Committee.

Mr. Leonard introduces himself and directs the committee members' attention to the invitations for the Wilson Library exhibit that he provided. **(Attachment 7)** Additionally, he shares that he provided the flyers regarding the Race to the Dan event which he says will be focused on academic presentations. **(Attachment 8)** He shares that Dr. Kickler will be leading a panel discussion on the importance of protecting Revolutionary War battlefields, and Dr. Wayne E. Lee, a Distinguished Professor of History at UNC Chapel Hill, and the 2025-2026 Charles Boal Ewing Chair of Military History at West Point, will be speaking about the Race to the Dan. He adds that Dr. Lee considers the Race to the Dan to be one of the most important campaigns of the Revolution. He goes on to mention some of the event sponsors including the NC Society of Cincinnati Society, the Bethania Historical Society, the Conservation Fund, and the Lewisville Historic Group.

Mr. Leonard also mentions that the Conservation Fund is working with the American Battlefield Trust and other organizations on protecting the battlefield which currently does not have any protected land. He shares that they are 30 other priority one national park classified battlefields in the nation, all of which have had some amount of land protected. He states that he cannot speak to the specifics of the current status as they are still in discussions with the landowner, but it is moving ahead and they have an opportunity to protect a very significant site. For reference, he shares that five of the priority one battlefields are in South Carolina and they all have some form of protection.

Finally, he shares that the work with various state agencies on repairs to portions of the Overmountain Victory Trail is going well.

Senator Alexander thanks Mr. Leonard for his comments. He asks Dr. Kickler and the members of the Committee if they have anything else to share. He thanks the Celebrate America Foundation for all of their work and partnership.

Senator Alexander recognizes Bob Rosser to speak to the Committee.

Mr. Rosser shares that he is working with the John Locke Foundation's NC 250 organization and asks how individuals or entities can apply or volunteer to participate in the Fourth of July Parade.

Senator Alexander offers to pass Mr. Rosser's information to Commissioner Farley regarding this request and notes that he believes the Celebrate America Foundation is sharing information about that application process. Dr. Kickler adds that Shop Local Raleigh is managing the application process for parade participation.

Senator Alexander concludes the meeting by reminding everyone to visit the exhibit on the third floor of the Legislative Building and thanking everyone for their hard work.

There being no further business, the meeting stands adjourned at 3:01 PM.

Senator W. Ted Alexander, Co-Chair
Presiding

Brooke Mason-Predy, Committee Clerk