

# Birthdays of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln: 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 federal government and nongovernmental 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<sup>1</sup> 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 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Washington's birth when his farewell address was read in a joint session of Congress,<sup>2</sup> a tradition that continues in the Senate each year.

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 holiday was expanded to all federal workers in 1885.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Congress, *Journal of the Senate of the United States*, 22nd Cong., 1st sess., July 16, 1832, p. 117, at [https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/SERIALSET-00211\\_00\\_00-001-0000-0000](https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/SERIALSET-00211_00_00-001-0000-0000).

<sup>2</sup> United States Senate, "About Traditions & Symbols – Washington's Farewell Address," at <https://www.senate.gov/about/traditions-symbols/washingtons-farewell-address.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> 23 Stat. 516, January 6, 1885. The act of January 6, 1885, specifically authorized pay for all federal employees on federal holidays. The statute read, "That employees of the Navy Yard, Government Printing Office, Bureau of Printing and Engraving, and all other per diem employees of the Government on duty at Washington, *or elsewhere in the United States*, shall be allowed the following holidays, to wit: The first day of January, the twenty-second day of February, the fourth day of July, the twenty-fifth day of December, and such days as may be designated by the President as days for national thanksgiving, and shall receive the same pay as on other days" (emphasis added).

<sup>4</sup> P.L. 90-363.

<sup>5</sup> 5 U.S.C. §6103.

## Legislation

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

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

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

## Related CRS Reports

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

## Selected 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 selected examples that may be of assistance in preparing such statements:

### Washington

Senator Ben Cardin, “Reading of Washington’s Farewell Address,” remarks in the Senate *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 170 (February, 26, 2024), pp. S971-S976. [Video]

Senator James Lankford, “Reading of Washington’s Farewell Address,” remarks in the Senate *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 169 (February, 27, 2023), pp. S487-S492. [Video]

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]

### Lincoln

Senator Todd Young, “Abraham Lincoln” *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 169 (February 14, 2023), pp. S379-S380.

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

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

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

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 275<sup>th</sup> Birthday in Mount Vernon, Virginia—President George W. Bush, February 19, 2007. [Video]

Proclamation—275<sup>th</sup> 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**

Statement on the 160<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation—President Joseph Biden, January 1, 2023.

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

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

Remarks Honoring President Abraham Lincoln’s 199<sup>th</sup> Birthday—President George W. Bush, February 10, 2008. [Video]

## **Government Resources**

Numerous federal 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 papers of Abraham Lincoln contain approximately 40,550 documents dating from 1774 to 1948.

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, including correspondence, letter-books, commonplace books, diaries, journals, financial account books, military records, reports, and notes accumulated by Washington from 1741 through 1799. Includes approximately 77,000 documents.

GovInfo, “Presidents’ Day”

This web page 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.

## **Nongovernment Resources**

Below are a selected list of nongovernmental resources for additional information on the history of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln:

Mount Vernon Ladies Association, “Celebrating George Washington’s Birthday.”

A timeline view of the history of celebrations around George Washington’s birthday, including informal and official celebrations.

The Abraham Lincoln Association, “The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln.”

A digitized multivolume set of Lincoln’s correspondence, speeches, and other writings transcribed and annotated by Roy P. Basler.

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