



Testimony

Submitted on behalf of the
Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry

**Informational Hearing on the Pennsylvania Commission for the United States
Semiquincentennial (America250PA) & Celebration Preparations**

Before the:
House Tourism and Recreational Development Committee

Presented by:
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Good morning Chairman Millard, Chair Daley, members of the committee,

My name is Kevin Sunday, director of government affairs for the Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry, the largest, broad-based business advocacy organization in the Commonwealth. The PA Chamber represents more than 9,000 member companies of all industrial and commercial categories and sizes.

It is an honor to address you this morning regarding the state's efforts to plan for the commemoration of the nation's 250 anniversary in 2026. The PA Chamber's President and CEO Gene Barr serves on the Pennsylvania Commission for the United States Semiquincentennial (America250PA), alongside many distinguished current and former public servants and leaders in industry and non-profit organizations.

As communities around the state welcome an influx of tourists and visitors for these events, it is our hope that they find Pennsylvania to be the place that we know it is – diverse in its traditions, cultures, and people, and rich in scenery, quality of life and opportunity. And whether these are visitors to the state for the first time, or families traveling back to their hometowns, we also then hope they might stay, imagining this would be quite a nice place to live, and help us build this state into what we know it can be – extending William Penn's vision of a land founded on tolerance and opportunity into the 21st century, where our industries, schools, non-profits and communities work towards the common good and create the goods and services needed for flourishing in a dynamic, modern economy.

As I am sure each of the members of the committee are aware, Pennsylvania was crucial to the nation's founding and its success through these two and half centuries. William Penn established this colony on the basis of tolerance and commerce, negotiating fishing rights with the Lenape tribes and making sure that Philadelphia had dedicated parks and green space. Pennsylvania was at the vanguard of the abolition movement, with the state's general assembly in 1712 attempting to end the importation of slaves, only to be overturned by the Crown. The state's General Assembly would pass the nation's first emancipation law in the waning days of the Revolution. And the 1787 debates over the Constitution in Philadelphia resulted, through compromise, in a remarkable document that enshrined a system of government that stands to this day. The preamble's clarion call "to establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty" remain a guiding light, even if we have not always lived up to these ideals.

Through these past 250 years, our state's fertile farmlands have fed this country. Our steel and our factories built the armaments and equipment that won world wars. We were host to major advances in energy that improved the quality of life for millions, from the first oil well to the first commercial nuclear plant. The polio vaccine was developed in Pittsburgh, and the technology that led to the covid vaccines was developed at Penn. We were the birthplaces of advances in communications, from the first radio broadcast to the first broadband relay.

While much has been gained over these past 250 years, there has also been loss. Not everyone has had their voices heard. Not everyone has had their dignity recognized by being given the opportunity to serve the good of their neighbor and community through the full use of their gifts and talents. As communities across this state plan their celebrations and tell their stories, we hope that this is an opportunity for everyone to be recognized for their roles in this state's history. And as we move forward, through 2026 and beyond, we at the PA Chamber are working to expand quality of opportunity, through our member-driven Bringing PA Back initiative.

Core to the success of both the Semiquincentennial and the Bringing PA Back initiative is infrastructure. Mobility is crucial to the ability of visitors and tourists to travel around the state. And opportunity – the opportunity to travel to a new job, to send your innovative product to market, to take advantage of our state's outdoors, to connect to high-speed data and leverage quantum computing to glean new insights into product and process design – depends on a modern and efficient system of infrastructure.

Each community has common needs but varied ends, and we appreciate the efforts of this committee, the legislature and America250PA to provide a local focus on needs as funds from the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the Motor License Fund, and contributions from foundations and the private sector for the Semiquincentennial are used to enhance ease of travel, access to amenities and broadly improve infrastructure in the state.

I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you this morning and look forward to any questions you may have.