

## SCR 21 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

### Senate Committee On Rules

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**Prepared By:** Cherie Stone, LPRO Analyst

**Meeting Dates:** 5/22

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#### **WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:**

Commemorates 69th anniversary of Vanport flood and remembers survivors and those who lost their lives.

#### **ISSUES DISCUSSED:**

#### **EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:**

#### **BACKGROUND:**

In the summer of 1942, industrialist Henry Kaiser took the City of Portland by surprise when he began breaking ground to establish a city that would later be known as Vanport. During this time, Portland employed discriminatory housing practices known as redlining which left many African American workers with few options for housing. The housing shortage also impacted incoming war workers and laborers who were traveling to Portland from all over the country. Henry J. Kaiser, who had recruited many laborers for his shipbuilding yards, decided that he would not wait on the City of Portland to create a housing authority in order to address the housing shortage. Instead, Henry Kaiser contacted the federal government himself, secured funding for the purchase of 650 acres of land along the Columbia River and the work of building a new city began. Through diligent efforts, and quick and efficient construction of housing structures, the first 400 residents of Vanport were in their apartments by Christmas of 1942. Later, the city would boast features of an established community including shopping centers, movie theatres, parks, schools and the only public library in any wartime housing project. In 1946, shipyard jobs became scarce due to the conclusion of World War II and people began to leave Vanport in droves.

Vanport was built on low-lying land that was kept dry by a protective barrier of berms and dikes intended to keep the city safe from the Columbia River. However, unpredictable weather conditions during 1947-1948 decimated the snow pack and swelled the Columbia River, causing water levels to rise to troublesome levels. On Sunday, May 30, 1948, a 600 foot section of railroad berm failed and water began surging into the city, leaving Vanport immersed under 20 feet of water. Many residents were able to evacuate the city in cars and busses, however, the accelerated influx of water began to outpace the vehicles trying to escape to safety and it became necessary to launch boats to rescue and evacuate the residents of Vanport. Fifteen people lost their lives during the Vanport flood while another 18,500 people were left without a home or most of their personal possessions. While the city of Vanport was demolished following the flood, the connections and community established there remain fortified amongst survivors to this day.

Senate Concurrent Resolution 21 commemorates the 69th anniversary of the Vanport flood and remembers the survivors and the 15 people who lost their lives.