

SCR 21 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Carrier: Rep. Kotek

House Committee On Rules

Action Date: 06/14/17
Action: Be Adopted.
Vote: 6-0-3-0
Yeas: 6 - Hack, Holvey, Kennemer, McLane, Nosse, Williamson
Exc: 3 - Barreto, Rayfield, Smith Warner
Fiscal: No fiscal impact
Revenue: No revenue impact
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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:

- Provisions of resolution

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No 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 new city, the City of Vanport. During this time, Portland was experiencing a housing shortage, negatively impacting war workers and laborers traveling to the city, and African-American workers who were left with few housing choices because of redlining. Mr. Kaiser decided that he would not wait on the City of Portland to create a housing authority to address the housing shortage but rather act himself. He contacted the federal government, secured funding for the purchase of 650 acres of land along the Columbia River and began to build a new city. Through diligent efforts, and quick and efficient construction of housing structures, the first 400 residents of Vanport could move into their new homes by Christmas of 1942. Vanport would come to boast features of an established city including shopping centers, a movie theater, parks, schools and the only public library in any wartime housing project. However, by 1946, shipyard jobs became scarce with 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 under 20 feet of water. Many residents could evacuate in cars and buses; 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. 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.