



LOCAL

Juneteenth

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# County officials in Indiana learn Juneteenth by any other name isn't Juneteenth

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On second thought, the Brown County commissioners' renaming of Juneteenth wasn't such a good idea.

They first considered "Old Settlersteenth," a reference to the county's Old Settlers Day festival every September. Then they voted to call the June 19 federal holiday "Brown County Employee Appreciation Day."

This controversial renaming came during discussions about the county's 2025 paid holiday schedule. And in the end, neither proposal stuck.

On Oct. 2, a month after the decision designating June 19, 2025, a paid holiday for the first time for Brown County employees — and some backlash for the name change — all three commissioners agreed to call the day commemorating the end of slavery in the U.S. what it is: Juneteenth.

During their October meeting, the commissioners apologized for their lapse regarding the significance of Juneteenth, which President Biden made a federal holiday in 2021.

The official name is Juneteenth National Independence Day, recognizing June 19, 1865, as the date the Emancipation Proclamation became the law of the land when enslaved people in Texas finally were freed.

At their meeting on Sept. 4, the commissioners added an item to the agenda: consideration and passage of the employee holiday calendar for 2025. There was a proposal to add

Juneteenth as a first-time holiday with pay next year, increasing the number of paid days off to 14 in non-election years.

## 'Old Settlersteenth?'

But they didn't agree on calling the new day off Juneteenth. Commissioner Blake Wolpert supported "Old Settlersteenth," which elicited some laughs, and further disagreement.

"I would not be in favor of having a holiday for our employees called Juneteenth," he said about an hour and 20 minutes into the Sept. 4 meeting. For him, "It's Old Settlersteenth or nothing," Wolpert said.

The commissioners said the name was "a matter of semantics" and agreed that no matter what the day was called, they supported equal rights for all.

As the discussion continued, Brown County Community Foundation board chairwoman Laurie Teal suggested they call June 19 Brown County Employee Appreciation Day, "to make it about them."

The commissioners embraced the name and voted 3-0 to rename Juneteenth. They thanked Teal and said the decision would "take some of the controversy off us" about the extra taxpayer-paid holiday.

## A change of heart – name reverts to Juneteenth

When Eunice Trotter got word of the name change, she decided to attend the commissioners Oct. 2 meeting to say a few words. Since 2022, she's been director of Indiana Landmarks' Black Heritage Preservation Program.

Indianapolis media organizations had heard the news as well; a few television stations turned their attention the October meeting.

"I was aware there was a proposal for Juneteenth, and it had gotten back to me there was some previous debate at the meeting," she said in an interview the day after the commissioners reversed course.

Trotter was delighted a small, rural Indiana county was making the day a paid holiday for its employees. She wasn't so pleased about the vote to change the name.

“No, what they wanted to call it, that’s not Juneteenth,” she said. “And while, of course, county employees are always appreciated, Juneteenth isn’t just for Black people, but for all people in this country.”

Juneteenth celebrates the end of a war fought over slavery that killed hundreds of thousands of soldiers on both sides, Trotter pointed out. “This holiday recognizes the end of that conflict,” she said, “a dispute over whether this nation would be a slave nation or not a slave nation.”

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