

Plans for 150th anniversary of Civil War face challenges



By Mel Evans, AP

Civil War re-enactors, including Robert Costello as Abraham Lincoln, participate Oct. 25 in Trenton, N.J., in an early commemoration of the state's role in war.

By Marisa Kendall, USA TODAY

As communities across the nation prepare to commemorate next year's 150th anniversary of the Civil War, some are struggling with a lack of funding, while a bill that could change that is stuck in a House committee.

The Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission Act, which would establish a national, federally funded committee to help organize commemorative events, was introduced to the House on March 4 by [Illinois Democratic Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr.](#) and then referred to the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, where it is still waiting to be passed, according to Jackson spokesman Andrew Wilson.

Democratic [Louisiana Sen. Mary Landrieu](#) introduced an act of the same name to the Senate in October 2009, but it never made it out of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Wilson says.

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N.M. CIVIL WAR TRAIL: ['Gettysburg of the West'](#)

Jackson says he hopes the bill will pass after Congress reconvenes on Nov. 15.

"We must use the sesquicentennial as a chance to make sure all of us, young and old, have an accurate appreciation of this transformative period in our nation's history," he said.

[Robert Rosen](#), a member of the [South Carolina Sesquicentennial Advisory Board](#), is not optimistic about the Sesquicentennial Commission Act. "I think Congress is just going to dodge it," he says.

Some events have already kicked off ahead of the April 12, 2011, anniversary of the Civil War's official first shot, which took place at Fort Sumter in Charleston, S.C. The commemoration will last until spring of 2015, says Cheryl Jackson, executive director of the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the [American Civil War Commission](#).

In the absence of a federal committee, some states have set up committees to plan commemorative events. Several, including those in

North Carolina, South Carolina, Missouri, New Jersey and Connecticut have been denied state funding.

"The biggest problem, of course, is there's no money from any source," Rosen says.

The Georgia Civil War Commission's state funding was cut from \$50,000 two years ago to \$10,000 this year, says [John Culpepper](#), commission chairman.

Gettysburg, Pa., has also been denied state funding, says Carl Whitehill, media relations manager of the Gettysburg Convention and Visitor's Bureau.

"It was certainly the hope and expectation that there would be some state funding," Whitehill says.

Virginia's state commission has received a \$2 million annual state appropriation, Jackson says.

Rosen attributes Congress' inaction regarding the Sesquicentennial Commission Act to controversy surrounding the Civil War. "It's kind of a political hot potato," Rosen says.

It would also be difficult to persuade conservatives to back a multimillion-dollar national committee in today's economy, says Daryl Michael Scott, vice president of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History. "I think many Americans have lost a sense of history," Scott says.

Barbara Franco, co-chairwoman of the Pennsylvania Civil War 150 Planning Committee, says one benefit to the lack of a national committee is local committees are more willing to tackle difficult or previously ignored issues, such as the role of African Americans, women and children, she says.

"That's a story that is a new story and really hasn't been told in previous commemorations," Franco says.

The sesquicentennial will be more inclusive than the 1960s centennial, which was planned by a federal commission and largely ignored the role of African Americans, says Hari Jones, curator of the African American Civil War Memorial and Museum.

"This story has really been a suppressed story for us," he says.

Michael Givens, commander in chief of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, hopes the Civil War commissions will look at all sides and not play a "p.c. game" blaming only the Confederacy.

Although the Virginia Sesquicentennial Commission will neither condone or condemn re-enactments this season, it plans to move away from the celebratory events that characterized the centennial and instead focus on education, says James Robertson, a member of the commission. "We're not out to celebrate anything," he says. "There's nothing to celebrate when three quarters of a million men died."