

Legislature doesn't convene on MLK Day for first time

Awards » NAACP honors politicians who helped change start date.

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[The Salt Lake Tribune](#)

Updated: 01/19/2009 07:42:12 AM MST

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For the first time, Jeanetta Williams and other members of the NAACP will attend the opening day of the Utah State Legislature, as they no longer need to protest the session beginning on Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

A constitutional amendment on the 2008 ballot changed the start date from the third Monday of January to the fourth, and excused the Legislature on Presidents Day as well.

It was a hard-won victory for Williams, president of the Salt Lake Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, which has worked for nearly a decade to change the session's start date.

"We felt that it was doing a disservice to Dr. King and his work and the civil rights work for the Legislature to continue to meet on that holiday," she said.

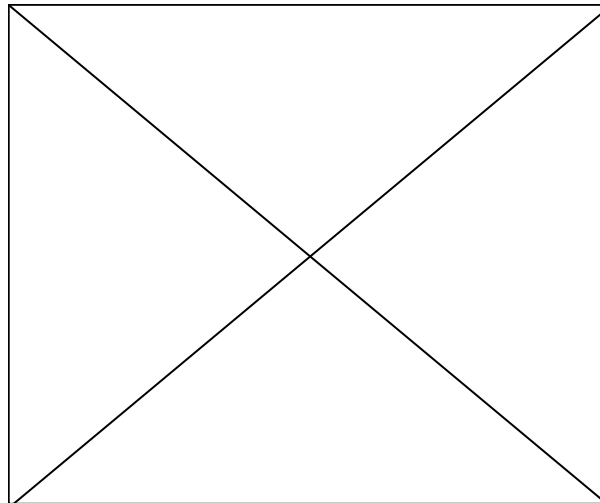
This year, the NAACP is honoring Salt Lake City Mayor Ralph Becker, former Speaker of the House Greg Curtis and former Senate President John Valentine for their efforts to pass the bill creating a constitutional amendment to change the session start date.

Forrest Crawford, an education professor at Weber State University and former chairman of the Martin Luther King Jr. Human Rights Commission, was glad to see the date change to help end tension it caused in the community.

He said many people felt that while legislators attempted to commemorate King on the day, it was a paltry effort compared to those of universities and human rights groups.

But he calls it a

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"lost opportunity" for the community to have a captive audience of the state's leaders to express its continuing needs for human rights.

"If you're not going to dignify it, then certainly, it doesn't make sense to engage in it," he said.

But he hopes those in the Legislature will continue to commemorate the holiday.

"Ultimately what we're talking about is the celebration of human rights and equality in our society and our state," he said.

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