Statement on Juneteenth from the Colorado Black Chamber of Commerce

Today the Colorado Black Chamber of Commerce celebrates President Biden signing into law the bill establishing Juneteenth as a federal holiday, commemorating the end of slavery in the United States. In light of the renewed racial justice awakening and social activism ignited by the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, the bill to make Juneteenth, or June 19th, a federal holiday passed the Senate by unanimous vote and passed the House by an overwhelming vote of 415 to 14. Juneteenth National Independence Day is now the 12th federal holiday, and the first since Martin Luther King Jr. Day (MLK Day) was created in 1983.

Although the Emancipation Proclamation of 1862 had officially outlawed slavery in those states which allowed people to be claimed as property, including Texas, enforcement of the Proclamation generally relied on the advance of Union troops. Despite the surrender of General Robert E. Lee at Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865, many enslaved people, including those in Galveston, TX, were unaware of the Proclamation and its meaning. On the morning of Monday, June 19, 1865, Union Major General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, Texas, to take command of the more than 2,000 federal troops there to enforce the emancipation of enslaved people and oversee a peaceful transition of power. At this point, Major General Granger, along with those federal troops, marched throughout Galveston reading General Order No. 3. The order informed all Texans that, in accordance with a Proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all enslaved people were free.

This, along with the passing of the Thirteenth Amendment, set the United States on a track to establish equality and equity for Black Americans. This is a track that we must continue even to this present day, and a track that the Colorado Black Chamber stands deeply committed to.

Today’s law recognizing June 19th as a federal holiday is another milestone of progress along that track. We, as a nation, must continue in an effort to attain “a more perfect union.” As Martin Luther King once stated: “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”