

Cowper establishes holiday to honor Martin Luther King

Gov. Steve Cowper has established Jan. 19 as a legal Alaska holiday to honor slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr.

Cowper, who used his powers of executive proclamation to establish the holiday for 1987, also ordered legislation drafted to create the third Monday in January as the King holiday on a permanent basis. The measure will be introduced in the upcoming session of the Legislature.

"A large percentage of Alaskans today weren't even born when Dr. King made his greatest contributions," he said. "They need to know how things were before he came on the scene and how one man armed only with the power of moral persuasion helped to make us a better nation."

Cowper's action means all state employees will receive a legal holiday on Jan. 19. Congress already has created a holiday for federal workers on that day, and private employers may grant holidays to their employees

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as they desire.

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King, who was born in Atlanta Jan. 15, 1929, began his activism in 1955 as the pastor of a Montgomery, Ala., Baptist church. From that humble beginning to his leadership of the civil rights movement, King dedicated himself to a principal of nonviolence from which he never wavered.

On April 4, 1968, while standing on a motel balcony in Memphis, King was shot to death.