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46TH DISTRICT

TESTIMONY ON HB 2009
Before the Committee Federal & State

February 5, 2019

Chairman Barker and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for time and attention today. I want to start by telling you what the bill before you is NOT about. It is not about disrespecting the culture and history of Italian-Americans or anybody else. It is not about political correctness, and it is not about rewriting history. One of the things that it is about, for me at least, is acknowledging how our attitudes and understanding have changed over the years.

I hope you will indulge by letting me go through a little bit of the history of the Columbus Day celebration. Celebration of Christopher Columbus's voyage in the United States is recorded from as early as 1792. Italian-Americans first observed Columbus Day in New York City on October 12, 1866. Colorado was the first state to make Columbus Day a state holiday, which it did in 1907. In 1934, Franklin D. Roosevelt proclaimed Columbus Day to be a federal holiday.

I would also like to talk to you about a federal court case, *Standing Bear v. Crook*, which was decided in 1879. One interesting thing about this case is that the plaintiff, Ponca chief Standing Bear, is the great great-grandfather of our colleague, Rep. Victors. Another interesting thing is that the decision in this case was the first federal legal opinion to recognize that a Native American was a "person" under US law.

I want to be clear about how those two things go together. When Columbus Day began to be celebrated in the United States, Native Americans were not recognized as human beings under US law. They weren't treated as second class citizens— they weren't treated as citizens at all. Fortunately, things have changed since then. And we now understand that while Columbus may have been the first European to visit the Americas, other than the Vikings, the continents that he "discovered" were already inhabited by millions of people. We further understand that the arrival of Columbus and the Europeans that followed him led to the deaths of tens of millions of those people through slavery, disease, and murder.

So as our understanding changes, I think it is appropriate that our holidays change, too. A number of states have already proclaimed the second Monday in October to be Indigenous Peoples Day or Native American Day, including South Dakota, North Carolina, Vermont, and Alaska. Dozens of cities across the US have done the same. In many Latin American countries, October 12 is known as "Día de la Raza" or (Day of the Race), and Belize and Uruguay celebrate it as Día de las Américas (Day of the Americas).

I think it is time to change our holidays to reflect our understanding of history and to give our Native American fellow citizens the respect they are due. I encourage you to join me in voting to make the second Monday of October Indigenous Peoples Day in Kansas.

I would be happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.