

To: House Federal and State Affairs Committee, Representative John Barker, Chairman

**From: Georgia Blackwood, an enrolled member of the Kickapoo Tribe in Kansas and a
Lawrence, Kansas Resident**

Date: February 4, 2019

Re: HB 2009- Indigenous People's Day

Good morning Chairman Barker and Members of the Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to present written testimony in support of HB-2009. My name is Georgia Blackwood and I am a lifelong resident of Lawrence, Kansas and a freshman at Lawrence High School.

I'm here today to support Indigenous People's Day. In October of every year, we have a holiday known as "Columbus Day". This day is to celebrate the initial "discovery" of the Americas, the "New World", by the Italian explorer Christopher Columbus. This celebration of the aforementioned "discovery" and on behalf of such an infamous historical figure as Christopher Columbus only perpetuates the myth that the American continents and all Indigenous peoples inhabiting these continents were here simply "waiting" to be discovered and exploited resources, as if Indigenous peoples were just part of the local fauna, and not in fact unique, dignified and distinct human civilizations already in existence at the time of Christopher Columbus' landing.

Celebrating Christopher Columbus is the equivalent of celebrating someone who, if he were to perpetrate the same atrocities today that he did in 1492, would be on trial for war crimes and crimes against humanity. In *Columbus Day: A Clash of Myth and History*, author Norman Solomon cites Christopher Columbus' personal log in part of an initial description of Indigenous people quoting, "they would make fine servants...with 50 men we could subjugate them all and make them do whatever we want". Solomon also quotes from a volume written by Bartolomé de las Casas, a Catholic priest who accompanied Christopher Columbus in *History of the Indies*, which states an observance of Spaniards "killing, terrorizing, afflicting, and torturing the native peoples", with "the strangest and most varied new methods of cruelty". Solomon further uses Bartolomé de las Casas' writings as an observance of "how systematic violence was aimed at preventing "[American] Indians from daring to think of themselves as human beings.". Las Casas was further quoted "My eyes have seen these acts so foreign to human nature, and now I tremble as I write". If we choose to question whether to continue to honor a figure such as Christopher Columbus, whose brutality and inhumane greed is documented both in his own log book and by a Catholic priest of his own expedition who observed his practices, shouldn't we question ourselves and our own values?

Historically, Christopher Columbus was celebrated as the first European to "discover" North America, or the Americas in general. It is now well documented and substantiated by archeologists and historians that in fact the North American continent was visited by Norse explorers, among them Leif Erikson, approximately 500 years prior to Christopher Columbus' arrival in the Bahamas.

It is because we should not celebrate the annual holiday known as Columbus Day, as a day celebrating Christopher Columbus.

It is for the following reason, the most important reason, that we should be celebrating the annual holiday known currently as Columbus Day as Indigenous People's Day. Indigenous People's Day should be a day to celebrate and acknowledge the fortitude, resilience and survival of the many Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas, who over the past 500+ years have been oppressed and marginalized. It should also be a day to celebrate the identities and dignities of all the Indigenous peoples in the Americas while also recognizing the numerous contributions past, present and future of Indigenous people. We should recognize the accomplishments and contributions of individual Indigenous people in our country, and those of the other countries in the American continents. We should recognize the histories of our many Indigenous nations and civilizations. Sadly, we must also use Indigenous Peoples Day as a day of remembrance of those Indigenous peoples and civilizations who are no longer living in our world community, whose languages are no longer being spoken, and whose wisdoms can no longer be shared with the rest of the world.

Let us not fall short in our duty to future generations in recognizing and celebrating Columbus Day, a day of stagnant mentality which perpetuates stereotypes and the marginalization of Indigenous people and pays homage to someone who committed human rights violations. Let us move forward recognizing and celebrating Indigenous Peoples Day, a day which recognizes the marginalized, breaks stereotypes, supports diversity, increases the education of future generations and helps to build bridges between all peoples.

Miigwetch. Thank you.

Georgia Blackwood