

Testimony on House Bill 2070

House Transportation Committee

Presented by

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Good afternoon Chairman Proehl and members of the House Transportation Committee. My name is Cole King, and I would like to speak briefly about House Bill 2070 and outline John Armstrong's profound and underappreciated influence on our state regarding the Bleeding Kansas period.

John Armstrong's impact on making Kansas a free state extends far beyond his pivotal role in establishing the first Underground Railroad station in Topeka. In fact, Armstrong recounted several times the story of how he influenced Union General James Lane, who would eventually become one of the first senators from Kansas, to come to Kansas to aid in making it a free state in 1855. After finishing his term as Representative from Indiana's 4th congressional district in March 1855, Lane moved his family to Kansas, eventually settling in Lawrence in November. At an Old Settlers' meeting in 1879, Armstrong recounted giving Lane "a glowing description" of Kansas and that he eventually "did prevail upon Lane to come to Lawrence, for three days after [Armstrong came to Kansas], he came [to Kansas] with his family." As has been well documented in Kansas history, General Lane was one of the most influential figures in the fight to make Kansas a free state. As has been documented in my peers' testimony, Armstrong

played a crucial role in the establishment of the Topeka station of the Underground Railroad in 1857. Additionally, Armstrong was essential in the establishment of several important stations along the Lane trail from Topeka to Civil Bend, Iowa. Armstrong's close connection with General Lane shows his profound, yet under-documented, influence in making Kansas a free state.

As John Brown was delivering slaves during his final exit from Kansas on the Lane Trail in 1859, he ran into some trouble in the Holton area. Upon hearing of Brown's trouble, Colonel John Ritchie and Armstrong collected a small cohort of men from Topeka and rushed north to Brown's aid. The skirmish, also known as the "Battle of the Spurs," ultimately ended without a shot fired, and Brown was able to leave Kansas safely, while delivering the slaves to freedom. This is the only documented contact between Armstrong and Brown during the Bleeding Kansas period. After Brown's exit from Kansas in 1859, Armstrong continued his anti-slavery activities, and eventually fought on the side of the Union in the Civil War.

It is for the reasons outlined above and in my peers' testimony that we ask you all to vote in favor of House Bill 2070. This bill would provide recognition to a very important, yet relatively unknown, Kansan who profoundly influenced the state's admission to the Union as a free state. Thank you for your time.