

Kathryn Gates  
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**Testimony opposing BH 2384 – Conveyance of the most historic site in Kansas to the Shawnee Tribe of Miami, OK**

Dear Representatives/Members of the House Federal and State Affairs Committee,

Why would you consider conveying an icon that is widely considered to be the most historic site in Kansas to any one non-public entity? The history of the Mission is not about any one group. It is the history of many different people and a wide range of historic events, both political and social. And why would you think that giving a Kansas State treasure to any non-public entity would ensure that the Mission remain an asset for all Kansans for generations to come?

The Mission has the highest designation our country can give because of its multi-faceted history that includes so many different people.

- Our State is named for the Kanza tribe, the aboriginal people who lived on the land where you sit now and on which the Mission stands.
- The first Trade School in the Louisiana Territory that was requested by the leadership of 22 tribes, all but one of which had been relocated from the Eastern United States. Students voluntarily attended in one or more trimesters, fall, winter, & spring, as their families chose. Its early name was Ft. Leavenworth Indian Manual Labor School
- Western expansion. Supply outpost for Oregon, California & Santa Fe Trail. Last place all 3 come together. Americans heading west for greater opportunity came through the Mission.
- Territorial Governor's offices & first Statehood vote all happened at the Mission
- Union soldiers stationed, at the Mission, protected Kansans from the violence of Bleeding Kansas
- During the Civil War the Mission was a Union encampment and Field Hospital for the Battle of Westport and the Battle of Big Blue.
- In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Mission was a WPA project, witnessed suburbanization happening all around, and is currently a vibrant place for experiential learning for people of ages.

Citizens in the early 1900's saw the significance of the Mission and the State had the wisdom to acquire the property from private owners so that generations of the day and those in the future could know the many stories from our past. Public ownership has made it possible for thousands of school children to understand the challenges of those who lived before them.

Today the state is joined by 2 other partners, the City of Fairway and the Foundation, in a unique public-private partnership that increases financial and human resources and the Mission's capacity to serve the people in our State. Our outreach and education programs are growing each year, and First Americans have important roles in programs, planning, and governance. The State has invested in new roofs and mechanical equipment. The City of Fairway has increased its investment in operations and the Foundation, with Fairway, is providing new programs for both adults and children and has also increased funding. The tens of thousands of hours of contributed volunteers continues to grow. A few examples that evidence these investments are:

- Western Academy series of presentations for adults and older school-age children. The first four programs in this series attracted several hundred people and topics included programs chosen by First Americans from 2 different tribes. In the next 6 months, 2 more new tribal presenters will be among the programs.
- Beyond the Classroom, experiential programs for younger children, features storytelling, cooking and experiences with food growing with heritage seeds, sports and more.
- Two First Americans are members of the Foundation Board and play key leadership roles in outreach and education program development.
- The partnership of State, City, & Foundation are committed to a new 10-year MOU that paves the way for bigger plans and investments. The Mission will become an even greater feather in the cap of Kansas as one of the most respected and remarkable National Historic Landmarks in our country. Its value to more and more Kansans will increase.



After 186 years, the Mission is in your hands. Can the Mission be a publicly owned place for many people, providing exciting experiences that illuminate a colorful Kansas past for an equally wide array of people? Or do you want to limit the stories the Mission can tell by removing the public from the ownership and giving the most historic site in the state away? Do you want to turn your back on the enthusiastic public-private partnership that sustains the Mission today, that involves and engages so many?

What proof of capable historic stewardship have those who wish to be the sole owners of this land demonstrated? How many volunteers will travel from Oklahoma to provide services? Or perhaps those volunteers will not be needed as it will not be a public space anymore? What evidence is there for the ability to collaborate and cooperate in projects that are not business deals? What happens over time to the Mission if the interest in the Mission wanes when new leadership follows? Have you researched these questions and asked others? Are you able to hear testimony on Tuesday and vote on Thursday with a belief that you have done due diligence and are serving those in our state who elected you? Are you serving and honoring those who have given so much time and money for nearly 100 years so that our State's most historic site still stands today for the citizens of Kansas while the other 2 missions of the day succumbed to development?

What is in the best interest of our citizens? Give away valuable, state-owned land, the most historic site in Kansas, to an out-of-state entity that called Kansas home for 25 years or less? Many of us have lived here longer. Or keep the Mission publicly held for all people, with lively presentations of its multi-faceted history and strong surety of being a valuable resource for Kansas for generations to come?

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kathryn Gates". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Kathryn Gates

Chair, Shawnee Indian Mission Foundation  
46-year Kansas resident

February 19, 2025