

STATEMENT OF THOMAS M. WABNUM
PRAIRIE BAND POTAWATOMI NATION
Senate Assessment and Taxation Committee
Regarding House Bill 2147
Thursday March 15, 2018, 9:30 A.M., Rm 548-S

Good Morning Chairwoman Tyson and Committee Members:

My name is Thomas M. Wabnum. I am a citizen of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation, and I am a member of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation Tribal Council. It is my distinct honor to be here this morning to present my testimony.

I am a third generation of U.S. Veterans. My grandfather served in the Army in World War I. His son, my father, served in the U.S. Navy in World War II as a Gunner on a Battleship and a Destroyer. In their footsteps, I served four (4) years in the U.S. Navy, including three (3) six (6) month tours on a Destroyer as a Navy Gunner in North Viet Nam from 1969 – 1973.

Many of my uncles have served in these World Wars. We have many Native women who also have served in the World Wars. Nearly 20 percent of the American Indian population, both men and women, were in either the armed forces or working for the war effort at home during World War II. We have many Prairie Band tribal citizens who have served in these World Wars. We have many tribal citizens from all of the Native Nations who have served in these World Wars, many of whom are with us today and we gratefully respect their service to this country.

As Native people of this country, our history is interesting but tragic, as our Federal-Indian Trust Relationship is the longest running, legal problem and still goes on today unresolved. The Dawes Allotment Act of 1887, the U.S. forced their way into our land and money business. The U.S., as our Trustee, had control over the Potawatomi Tribes' estimated 20 million plus acres of land, with which we should have never been a financial burden to this country. We have taken the U.S. to federal court for their failure to understand their own fiduciary trust duty in the loss of our own land, money and tribal sovereignty in Cobell vs Norton in 1996.

It was in 1919 that the first Indians were granted U.S. citizenship. American Indian soldiers and sailors were granted U.S. citizenship first in 1919, five (5) years before the Snyder Indian Citizenship Act granted citizenship to all American Indians in 1924. This Act came about largely in recognition of the thousands of Indians who served in the armed forces during World War I. In the Wheeler-Howard Act of 1938 or the Indian Reorganization Act, the major goal was to reverse the time-honored goal of force assimilation of Indians into American society, and to strengthen, encourage and perpetuate the tribes as well as their historic traditions and culture. In 1953, Public Law 280 gave six (6) states criminal jurisdiction over Indian reservations. In 1956, the Relocation program offered job training and housing assistance to Indians if they would leave the reservation for urban areas. In 1954, the House Concurrent Resolution 108 of the 83rd Congress, a hearing was held to discuss the termination of the Kansas Tribes, including the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation. As the Potawatomi Tribe, we have the most treaties with the United States.

Over the past two (2) centuries, Native citizens have been under attack, living under federal regulations all for just being who they are and residing on the land they once owned.

Regardless of the disparate and frequently unfair treatment the U.S. displayed to Native citizens, when foreign enemies attacked our Country, our citizens responded with our traditional and civic duty to defend this great country. This is perhaps the reason the Pentagon reports American Indians and Alaska Natives participate in the military at a higher rate than any other racial or ethnic group in the United States.

Today, Native Nations, National Indian Organizations, Congress, some States and especially Native veterans, recognize the illegal state taxation of their military wages that has occurred over the years. To my understanding only two (2) states, New Mexico and last year Arizona have begun this process of providing a way to pay back the Native Veterans for the illegal withholding of their income.

Legislators, I would respectfully request that you begin the process to right this wrong and begin the work to assist Native American veterans in Kansas to regain what is rightfully theirs.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions.