

Testimony before House Federal and State Affairs
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House Bill 2385

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Vice Chair, Ranking Member and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today in support of House Bill 2385. We are proud of the heritage of the polka and believe it should be our state dance.

The polka has been around since before statehood, arriving with the pioneers. It is a dance that is enjoyed by many different cultures, including several of the ethnic groups that would form early communities in Kansas. Most Eastern European cultures have their version of the polka, but Germans dance the polka and there are also polkas that migrated up from Mexico. Did you know that in the 1850s, when the person that was supposed to be our Free State Governor was jailed by pro-slavery forces, abolitionists wrote a song to play at fundraisers for him back east? That man was Charles Robinson, who would go on to be our first governor. That song was a polka. The "Governor Robinson's Polka."

But it is not just the history of the polka that makes it a great state dance. Rarely do you find an old-time dance that is still enjoyed today as widely as the polka. You can dance the polka on Friday nights at Barto's in Frontenac, Kansas, or at any wedding in Wilson. You can dance it at a Catholic Parish hall in Hays, or even at a true Sokol Hall here in rural Shawnee County. In fact, that Sokol Hall will be hosting a polka dance on April 26th, and I'm sure they'd love to have a crowd. We've been there before and it is a neat part of our history.

We also like the polka because it is fun and easy. The music is a quick 2/4 time and the dance is a "step-hop-step". Our mom says it is so easy that even our dad can almost do it, sort of.

Finally, did you know that dancing the polka can make you live longer? Our most famous polka couple in Ellsworth, Dale and Dorothy Grothusen, have been doing the polka together since they got married in 1945. Dale is now 101 and Dorothy is 97!

We think that celebrating the polka as the state dance is a great way to discover part of our history, enjoy music, and get some exercise. Thank you for allowing us to share why we believe the polka should be the state dance. We urge the bill's favorable recommendation.