

Chairman Barker and committee.

I speak to you today as a proponent of HB 2006. Chickasaw Saya – I am Chickasaw. My cultural ties were fractured due to my Native American grandfather's death when my father was only 18 months old. Even though my father was raised by his white mother and her parents, he learned what he could from my grandfather's brothers during their occasional weekend encounters. My father insisted that his children, myself and my younger brothers would also learn of our tribal heritage, something we did mostly through books. I was brought up to be proud of being Chickasaw. I've tried my best to instill this pride into my children as well. As a career educator, I also know that words spoken by a teacher in a classroom become fact for the students – even if they are from outside the experience and knowledge of that teacher. When my oldest child was in first grade, his teacher asked me if I would speak to the class on Thanksgiving from a Native American perspective. She was nearing retirement and had taught this lesson a number of times, and so she added: "you know, how the Pilgrims brought superior agricultural techniques, and basically saved the Indians from starvation." I quickly corrected her. She had been teaching this in error for over thirty years. I thought back to my own education. Early on I learned that "Columbus sailed the ocean blue, in 1492". A true statement. Back then (late 60's early 70's) no one bothered, or maybe didn't know themselves, to teach us that Christopher Columbus never set foot in the contiguous 48 states, the closest he came was Puerto Rico, and not until 1493. No one taught us that Columbus enslaved thousands of the Taino people in the Caribbean and sent them back to Spain to be sold. No one taught us that, as Governor of Hispaniola, Columbus tortured people and ordered the dismembered bodies of those who dared to rebel be paraded through the villages as a warning to others. – We were taught that Christopher Columbus "Discovered" America. What we know now, is that Columbus wasn't the first European in North America – Leif Erikson preceded Columbus by some 500 years, yet we don't celebrate Leif Erikson Day. Columbus wasn't the first European to set foot on what we think of as the United States of America – that was Juan Ponce de Leon – yet we don't have a Ponce de Leon Day. We also know that, before Columbus, there were hundreds of distinct, separate nations and cultures, living and thriving in the Americas. Isn't it time we honor those who were here before and whose descendants occupy offices within this very institution? Or do we continue to teach misinformation and just leave out the negative parts? We speak of the Columbus Exchange – a term that refers to that early exploration, where goods, and plants – found in the Americas – were introduced to Europe. Its often cited as a great cultural exchange. Columbus took plants, goods and slaves back to Europe, and left smallpox and bubonic plague with the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean. Isn't it time that Kansas joins Vermont, Maine, New Mexico, Alaska, South Dakota (which celebrates Native American Day), Oregon, Hawaii (which celebrates Discoverer's Day), Louisiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Washington DC, North Carolina, and Iowa, in celebrating Indigenous People's Day instead of Columbus Day?

Thank you for your time

Representative Stephanie Byers,

District 86,

Proud member of the Chickasaw Nation

