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House Federal and State Affairs Committee Members
Regarding HB 2208 Conveying Ownership of the Shawnee Indian Mission Site to the Shawnee Tribe.

Dear Committee Members.

I am providing comments to the committee regarding House Bill 2208 which has been introduced and would convey the Shawnee Mission site to the Shawnee Tribe.

I served as the Vice Chair of the Shawnee Tribe Cultural and Historical Preservation Committee (STCHPC) which was formed in early 2020 to help document and preserve the many historical sites that exist across the United States. There were several tribal members on the committee, nearly all of them were well-versed in either historic or cultural aspects of our tribe. I had extensive knowledge about Kansas City where the Shawnee lived in the early and mid-1800's. I have been researching our history in Kansas City since the late 70's, and have been to the Mission, and the local historical societies many times. I worked with several local historians in the 80's who were experts on Shawnee history. Many of them have passed away, but they left a significant amount of information on our tribe's history in the area. Some members of my family attended the Shawnee Mission School and others were trustees.

Over the past eight or nine years, I have come to know Chief Barnes, on a personal level, as well as in my Vice-Chair capacity. I was the one who introduced the Mission to Chief Barnes in 2020 telling him that we needed to develop a relationship with the Mission administration to help them tell the story of our Shawnee people. Chief Barnes was essentially unaware of the existence of the Mission. I explained that it is the only tangible relic left of the Shawnee Tribe that our people can see and touch. It would be a great benefit to both our tribe, and the Mission administration if we could help them keep the Mission intact and viable.

But, in classic Chief Barnes fashion, he decided to hire a lobbyist in an all-out effort to wrestle the Mission away from the State of Kansas. Chief Barnes said that if he could own the Mission, which would then be Trust Land, then he could build casinos anywhere he liked in Kansas.

If you are not aware, Chief Barnes has no interest in Shawnee history, or culture. He has said on numerous occasions that dressing up in 200-year-old costumes is stupid. Chief Barnes has spent

his entire working career operating casinos. He truly knows nothing else.

Everything we did on our committee was sabotaged by Chief Barnes. He was not interested at all in what we were doing, and eventually alienated the most knowledgeable historical and cultural people in the tribe. I was the first to resign from the committee when I had been asked to do a Zoom presentation on the history of the Shawnee for a historical society in Johnson County. Chief Barnes told our chairman that I didn't have any business doing that, and since I was a "representative of the tribe", he didn't want me to do it. He told our chairman that his main concern was that I might use the word "disestablished" in my talk. He was worried that I would open a can of worms by using this word, which he had the week before on TV. He realized that by using that word, it brings up the fact that the Federal Government had never officially disestablished the Kansas reservation. If the reservation were to be disestablished, it would eliminate any claims by the Shawnee to land in Kansas. He is terrified by that possibility.

Not too long ago, Chief Barnes fired the rest of the STCHPC after he hired a highly paid Director for our Cultural Center. He gave her the duty of managing the STCHPC, which didn't exist any longer. The Cultural Center has been closed since 2019 due to COVID and was converted into offices. A few years earlier Chief Barnes fired the original Director who had been working hard at promoting the new Cultural Center and creating exhibits through grants she received. She told me that Chief Barnes and his administration had mismanaged the grant money so badly that she ended up turning them in to Federal agencies. The tribe was required to repay the grant money.

When Chief Barnes was elected in 2019, he started hiring dozens of people for his entourage. If you don't know, Chief Barnes, I like to call him "King Barnes", is a narcissist of the worst kind. He gets everything he wants through the intimidation of the Shawnee Business Council members. Chief Barnes dreams up his schemes, whatever they are, and brings them to a vote for funding for the Business Council. There is only one BC member who has the will to vote no, realizing these schemes are not in the best interest of the tribe. He has been verbally attacked by Chief Barnes in BC meetings and was excluded from running for the Chief position last year. Chief Barnes revised the election requirements which effectively eliminated this person from running. This BC member sued the tribe over the new requirements, but was defeated in Shawnee Court, which is bought and paid for by, Chief Barnes. This member brought Chief Barnes up on election violations, of which there were many, but the ethics committee, made up of friends of Chief Barnes denied the claims.

I could go on and on about the bad things this man has done. But my message to you is that if you convey the Mission over to Chief Barnes, who is "the Shawnee Tribe", there is no telling what will happen. He does not have any interest in the history of the site, and no desire to better the people in his tribe. Since becoming Chief, he has provided very little support for tribal members even though the casino in Guymon brings in nearly 5 million dollars each month. In fact, he has grown his administration so much, including purchasing several buildings, that he has had to pull back the money for many programs because he is over-extended. When he does

introduce a new program, it is never funded properly. It is all smoke and mirrors. Several of the people he hired no longer work for the tribe, including our Cultural Center director. I don't know if he eliminated the positions, or they left on their own accord. No one is happy working there, except those that are benefiting monetarily. You should see the Range Rovers in the parking lot now where there used to be Chevy Cruzes.

Another thing that Chief Barnes has implemented is that no Shawnee citizen is allowed to review the accounting of funds of the tribe. He and his lawyers have said that no one needs to see the accounting of tribal funds and have claimed Tribal Sovereignty. One of our citizens took this to Shawnee court, and guess what, it was thrown out due to Tribal Sovereignty. It just gets worse.

I know that Chief Barnes has no interest in the history of the Mission. His ongoing hype about the possibility of children being buried there is nothing but hype. He jumped on that bandwagon just to raise a stink and make himself look like a champion of his people. It is quite well documented how many children died during those years the Mission was open. I was not very many. I doubt that they will find any graves on that site if they were to do ground penetrating radar.

Chief Barnes claims that the Shawnee Business Committee and his citizens are behind his efforts to obtain the Mission. It has rarely come up in the BC meetings, and he has never asked them for their blessing. There is no Shawnee Tribe. There is only King Ben Barnes.

Why am I doing this? I cannot stand the lies that Chief Barnes has told our citizens and the public regarding the Shawnee Mission. He truly knows nothing about the history of the Mission and has no interest in preserving that history. He is all about casinos and making money. Unfortunately, very little of the money is reaching our citizens. It is disgusting to have a man in charge that behaves in the way that he does. As a matter of fact, he threatened one of my cousins where she felt scared enough that she decided to hire a bodyguard when she attended some tribal activities last fall.

I hope you will review what I've said, as well as many others who are against this conveyance. If it is conveyed, I believe it will be a sad day for the state of Kansas and the Shawnee Tribe.

Sincerely,



James C. Lee
Shawnee Tribal Citizen
Cherokee Nation Tribal Citizen