

**PLEASE VOTE YES TO REPLACE COLUMBUS DAY WITH CABRINI DAY**

**HB20-1031 (AS AMENDED)**

- Grant American Indians' request to reduce the harm they experience from Columbus Day, by retiring it as a state holiday.
- Enact new state holiday (first Monday in October) to honor a Colorado Italian humanitarian.
- Do nothing to disrupt October as Italian American Heritage Month.
- Do nothing to disrupt celebration of federal Columbus Day (second Monday in October).
- Accept that both sides have firmly held opinions on the character of Christopher Columbus the man, whose landing defines the beginning of massive devastation of American Indians.
- Appreciate the novel solution, suggested by an Italian American Knight of Columbus.
- Become the first state in the union to honor a woman with a state holiday.
- Put this matter to rest by passing this bill!

Thank you,

Libby Comeaux, CoMember, Loretto Community  
Ret. State Employee, Ret. Colorado Attorney  
1663 Steele St #901  
Denver, CO 80206  
720-320-8723

**Testimony before House Committee on HB20-1031, AS AMENDED, 2-4-2020**

**Thank you, my name is Libby Comeaux. I am a retired state employee, retired Colorado attorney, ethnically Catholic, trained mediator, and a co-member in the Loretto Community, a faith-based organization with staff office in Littleton.**

**I urge you to vote YES on HB20-1031 (as amended). We hope the language of this bill allows you to address the concerns of both sides in this long and frustrating stand-off without doing anything to directly offend either of them. It is a novel compromise, suggested by an Italian American, a Knight of Columbus.**

**This bill will allow you to:**

- **Retire the current state holiday as an acknowledgment of the harm it is causing American Indians, especially their children;**
- **Honor an Italian American humanitarian with a new state holiday on the first Monday of October;**
- **Avoid disrupting ethnic traditions centered around Italian American Heritage Month each October and the Columbus Day parade on the second Monday of October;**
- **Be the first state in the union to recognize a woman with a state holiday.**

**The history of attempts to retire Columbus Day as a state holiday is replete with testimony on the horrendous genocide and ecocide that followed on a flawed justification contained in the 15<sup>th</sup> century papal bulls. Those with a love of the existing holiday understandably come to Columbus' defense. I ask whether this august body can possibly hold these contradictions with compassion and not feel compelled to resolve them. The language of this bill allows you to do so.**

**The groups historically opposing successive versions of this bill have something in common with the American Indians who are supporting it. Both sides have suffered discrimination. What differs is whether the holiday helped or hurt them.**

- The Knights of Columbus were formed by one immigrant group – Irish Catholics – as a strategy to overcome ostracism, harassment, substandard living conditions, and violent terrorism based on the prejudices of the late 1800's and early 1900's.<sup>1</sup> The creation of the Columbus Day holiday helped this group, as well as Italian Americans,<sup>2</sup> gain recognition as loyal Americans which they enjoy today.**
- Unfortunately the existing holiday has harmed American Indians every year. As state action, it venerates the idol of that flawed 15<sup>th</sup> century ideology that led to the Colorado Territorial policy of extermination and the Sand Creek Massacre and continues. It is time to retire this state-endorsed holiday; we just want to find a way that is compassionate to the ethnic groups who have benefited from it.**

**The proposed holiday will function to protect American Indians – especially the children – from the ostracism, humiliation, and reactivated generational trauma that the current holiday inflicts on them. It will uplift an Italian woman with strong connection to Colorado. She was a beacon of hope and compassion for immigrants and refugees. Her intuitive recognition of Water as sacred source of life makes her relatable to American Indians. She will be the first woman in the US who has a state holiday honor her. And all of that is about time!**

**Please vote YES.**

Thank you

Libby Comeaux

[libby.comeaux@gmail.com](mailto:libby.comeaux@gmail.com)

Denver 80206

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<sup>1</sup> <https://president.nd.edu/homilies-writings-addresses/letter-to-campus-regarding-columbus-murals/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/10/12/opinion/columbus-day-italian-american-racism.html>

## Additional References:

Series of 15<sup>th</sup> century papal bulls <https://doctrineofdiscovery.org/papal-bulls/>

- *Inter Caetera II* (May, 1493) (The papal order to “give, grant, and assign to you and your heirs and successors, kings of Castile and Leon, **forever**, together with all their dominions, cities, camps, places, and villages, and all rights, jurisdictions, and appurtenances, all islands and mainlands found and to be found, discovered and to be discovered [unless east of a N-S line along west side of present-day Brazil, or already possessed by another Christian European king]”) <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/alex06/alex06inter.htm>
- *Romanus Pontifex* (1455) (extending *Dum Diversas* to authorize Portuguese royalty to claim title to lands and possession of peoples *previously seized* in Africa and to rule over them; reiterating the authority “to invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ wheresoever placed, and the kingdoms, dukedoms, principalities, dominions, possessions, and all movable and immovable goods whatsoever held and possessed by them and to reduce their persons to **perpetual slavery**, and to apply and appropriate to himself and his successors the kingdoms, dukedoms, counties, principalities, dominions, possessions, and goods, and to convert them to his and their **use and profit**.” <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/nichol05/romanus-pontifex.htm>
- *Dum Diversas* (1452) (authorizing the King of Portugal to go to the west coast of Africa and “capture, vanquish and subdue the Saracens, pagans and other enemies of Christ and put them into perpetual slavery and to take all their possessions and their property”). Latin original: <https://books.google.com/books?id=6NDmAAAAMAAJ&dq=%22Bullarium%20patronatus%20Portugalliae%20Regum%22&pg=PA22#v=onepage&q&f=false>

1496 Patent granted by King Henry VII to John Cabot and his sons: <https://doctrineofdiscovery.org/patent-cabot-henry-vii/>

## US SUPREME COURT:

- *Johnson v. M'Intosh*, 8 Wheat. 543, 5 L.Ed. 681 (1823) (**An Indian cannot sell his land because it does not belong to him, it belongs to the federal government**);
- *TEE-HIT-TON Indians v. US*, 348 U.S. 272, 75 S.Ct. 313 (1955) (**Alaskan Natives have no right to compensation for timber removed from their lands without their consent**);
- *City of Sherrill, NY, v. Oneida Indian Nation*, 544 U.S. 197 (2005) (**Oneida Nation cannot reassert sovereignty over land that it purchased within its Canandaigua Treaty recognized reservation.**) “Under the ‘doctrine of discovery,’ ...’fee title to the lands occupied by Indians when the colonists arrived became vested in the sovereign—first the discovering European nation and later the original States and the United States.” *County of Oneida v. Oneida Indian Nation of NY*, 470 US 226, 234 (1985) (*Oneida II*). *Note also, Ottawa Tribe v. Logan*, 577 F. 3d 634 (6<sup>th</sup> Cir, 2009) (**The Tribe’s treaty-guaranteed fishing rights were “abandoned” when the federal government forcibly removed the tribe in the 1830’s.**)

## OTHER:

January 20, 2019 letter of president of University of Notre Dame to campus regarding Columbus murals. “**The murals present us with several narratives not easily reconciled, and the tensions among them are especially perplexing for us because of Notre Dame’s distinctive history and Catholic mission. At the time they were painted, the murals were not intended to slight Indigenous Peoples, but to encourage another marginalized group. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Notre Dame’s Catholic population, largely immigrants or from families of recent immigrants, encountered significant anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant attitudes in American public life. At the same time, Columbus was hailed by Americans generally as an intrepid explorer, the ‘first American’ and the ‘discoverer of the New World.’ Gregori’s murals focused on the popular image of Columbus as an American hero, who was also an immigrant and a devout Catholic. The message to the Notre Dame community was that they too, though largely immigrants and Catholics, could be fully and proudly American. ¶ For the native peoples of the ‘new’ land, however, Columbus’s arrival was nothing short of a catastrophe. Whatever else Columbus’s arrival brought, for these peoples it**

led to exploitation, expropriation of land, repression of vibrant cultures, enslavement, and new diseases causing epidemics that killed millions. As Pope John Paul II said in a 1987 meeting with the Native Peoples of the Americas, ‘the encounter [between native and European cultures] was a harsh and painful reality for your peoples. The cultural oppression, the injustices, the disruption of your way of life and of your traditional societies must be acknowledged.’” <https://president.nd.edu/writings-addresses/2019-writings/letter-to-campus-regarding-columbus-murals/>

- Long list, with documents, of faith communities standing in solidarity with the request of Indigenous Peoples that the Doctrine of Discovery be abolished. <https://doctrineofdiscovery.org/faith-communities/>

Documentation of Continuing Impacts of the Doctrine of Discovery on Indigenous Peoples – some samples:

- UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues reports: 2014 Study on the Impacts of the Doctrine of Discovery on Indigenous Peoples, <http://undocs.org/E/C.19/2014/3>
- 2013 Reports of Special Rapporteur James Anaya to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues:
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttCQm27WqKY>
  - [http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session24/Documents/A\\_HRC\\_24\\_41\\_Add.4\\_ENG.doc](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session24/Documents/A_HRC_24_41_Add.4_ENG.doc)



Libby Comeaux &lt;libby.comeaux@gmail.com&gt;

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**Catholic voice in support of HB 18-1231: repealing Columbus Day**

1 message

Libby Comeaux &lt;libby.comeaux@gmail.com&gt;

Fri, Mar 9, 2018 at 7:48 AM

To: [REDACTED]house@state.co.us

Dear Rep. [REDACTED]

I respectfully offer a **Catholic voice in support of HB 18-1231: repealing Columbus Day** as a state holiday and replacing it with Election Day. Today, Catholics have learned, and we must continue to learn, to face our own institutional shadow when we must. Together with faith communities around the world, we are facing the legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery.

Though not historically accurate, Columbus is credited with being the European "discoverer" of America - and what is historically accurate is that the then-sitting pope followed up immediately with an official grant of perpetual jurisdiction over the lands and peoples of the Americas to the King of Spain who financed his trip. (At that time, the pope was civil as well as ecclesiastical ruler over Europe.) The basis for his order was that the peoples of the Americas were non-Christian; it was in a series of papal bulls that similarly authorized African slavery. This is not to criticize the Catholic faith, but to observe the historical, institutional fact that this civil decree became the foundation for the U.S. treatment of indigenous peoples, formalized through the 1823 case which is still in effect, *Johnson v. McIntosh*.

*Series of Papal Bulls: Inter Caetera, 1494, incorporating order from prior papal bulls Dum Diversas and Romanus Pontifex, to "invade, capture, search out, vanquish and subdue all Saracens and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ wheresoever placed ... and reduce their persons to perpetual slavery...and to appropriate to himself and his successors ... the kingdoms, counties, ... possessions and goods, and to convert them to his ... use and profit.*

So when I testified before the Committee February 28, I tried to emphasize the symbolic role of Columbus as the harbinger of European colonialism in the Americas. The discrimination against indigenous peoples that has been historic in our country was religious in origin, and state sponsorship of Columbus Day should end for that reason alone. There would be nothing to prevent private celebrations, such as those that occur on St Patrick's Day.

Catholics of faith embrace the Beatitudes and practice compassion, as current Pope Francis seeks to demonstrate. He speaks out against a well-documented, continuing legacy of oppression suffered by indigenous peoples in the Americas. Our current state historian once recommended changing the name of Nichols Hall at the University of Colorado Boulder, expressing this concern: "When a name that most people take for granted brings distress to a significant number of people within the University, then the University has an obligation to look into the problem."

Religious bigotry should never be practiced by the state. Although it is true that the Ku Klux Klan in the early 20th century terrorized Catholics in Colorado, as stated by another witness at the Committee hearing, and even if the Klan submitted a bill to abolish Columbus Day in that era, HB 18-1231 is most definitely not about anti-Catholic bigotry. Catholics today are a respected political force and affect mainstream policy in numerous ways. HB 18-1231 seeks to take a stance against religious bigotry, in compassion for indigenous groups who, understandably and with good reason, find this holiday distressing because of the violent history of European colonization of the Americas as it has direct and continuing effects on them.

For this reason, based on the compassion that is inherent in all major religious traditions, and to take a stand against religious bigotry, please vote FOR HB 18-1231.

Thank you,  
Elizabeth A Cômeaux, attorney