

The Rev. Richard A. Gianzero  
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January 29, 2020

Hon. Adrienne Benevidez and the General Assembly  
200 E. Colfax Ave.  
Denver, Colorado 80203

**In re to support for HB20-1031**

Dear Rep. Benevidez and the General Assembly,

Thank you for the opportunity to write in support of repealing Columbus Day as a State holiday in Colorado. I currently serve as a Lutheran pastor in Commerce City, Colorado. My forebears arrived in the United States from Italy in 1934 and our family name is engraved on Panel 161 of The Wall of Honor at the Ellis Island National Museum of Immigration.

During my time at Catholic school, in fourth grade specifically, I remember being called a racial slur by an older student. I went home troubled. My father explained the meaning of that slur. When I became a Lutheran a Lutheran pastor aimed the same racial slur at me while laughing and calling it a joke. Suffice to say, within jokes a certain truth often shrouds itself in disingenuous laughter.

I share this story because, while less common in 2020, it still happens. Sadly, the European immigrant histories of the United States shroud themselves with a disingenuous romanticized narrative. Italian peoples were not labeled “white” or “Caucasian” or accepted as “real” Americans upon arrival. We were often referred to as “half-Negro” or “mongrels” of mixed “stock” and “blood.” The Klu Klux Klan called our forebears an “infestation” that would “darken” the “pure stock” of Teutonic, Alpine, English, and Aryan blood in the U.S.

When our forebears were donned with the illusionary and racist cape of whiteness future generations and us their descendants conveniently forgot whence we came. Many of our grandparents and parents assimilated into the façade of “white” culture in order to become “Americans.” That is to say, some version of idealized Americans. Our forebears had more in common with other oppressed communities than we often admit. Admittance of such would block our assimilated Americanization process – we couldn’t become “white” if we stood in solidarity with Black, Asian, Jewish, and Spanish-speaking communities.

Many Italian peoples surrendered to the pressures of assimilation. Some yearned for an assimilated acceptance while acquiescing to the sacrifice of identities in the name of “yearning to breath free.” The ideal of freedom carried conditions of assimilation when our forbears were granted whiteness. To become American during the heights of Italian immigration waves was to become white.

Through this process our forebears missed opportunities to discover solidarity with other peoples who then, and now, experienced the manacles of forced assimilation, exclusion and racial discrimination. Instead of empathy towards and with others many of our forebears traded solidarity for feigned acceptance into the dominant society.

The near blind allegiance towards a day, called Columbus Day, reminds me of how little people of Italian heritage remember and know our own history. While the Klu Klux Klan tried to block Columbus Day celebrations last century, they did so out of a racist and religious discrimination motive. Racist groups did not want “half-Negro” Italians celebrating their heritage. Never mind the fact that “Italian” represented a linguistic group during Columbus’ time. No such nation-state or ethnic group would exist until the 19<sup>th</sup>-century.

Italian immigrants to the U.S. wanted something to honor their heritage and assuage the psychological pains of physical violence and public discrimination towards them. Columbus thus became an unexamined focal point of celebrating Italian heritage.

As people and peoples became more aware of what Christopher Columbus actually did and said a resistance to honoring the individual arose. Nevertheless, people of Italian heritage seem blindly allegiant to this non-Italian (again no such nationality existed during his time) sailing under the colonizing flag of an empire. Indeed, in a strange twist of irony many today rally around the symbol of Columbus or Columbus Day as a token of so-called Western Civilization. Thus what the KKK and other white supremacists objected to in the past they now use to employ a historically inaccurate but expedient pseudo-defense of illusionary Western Civilization.

The problem with honoring Columbus Day or Columbus in 2020 lies with the man himself, always problematic, and what the current holiday represents. A problem also lies in what Columbus does not represent.

Columbus represents the beginning of American Indian genocide, slavery, and colonialism in a land previously unknown to the powers of old Europe. It represents the idea that land and people are simply obstacles or opportunities to exploit in the name of empire. Columbus writes of these things himself and celebrates them.

People of Italian heritage attach cultural pride with Columbus Day, but I do not believe Columbus represents a person or ideals worthy of cultural pride. Columbus Day does not represent the Italian immigrant experience in the U.S. My description above of Italian-American experiences articulates an authentic narrative I believe many of us know.

I believe removing Columbus Day as a State holiday in Colorado invites people of Italian heritage to revisit our experiences in the U.S. But it also reminds us of the broader invitation to stand in solidarity with other people groups who continue to face the torrents of racial and religious discrimination. We can and must acknowledge the atrocities Columbus begins towards the people he called Indians. We must acknowledge the atrocities of European colonization, and

the birth of the transatlantic slave trade. We must acknowledge the ongoing ways in which false narratives serve as an illusionary and oppressive ideal.

As a Christian and Lutheran pastor to acknowledge means to confess and move from something harmful. It is also to move toward something healthy. I believe honoring Mother Cabrini, in place of Columbus, allows people of Italian heritage to celebrate someone who embodies ideals of human compassion, kindness, and character. Mother Cabrini came to this country to serve the newest waves of Italian immigrants facing discrimination and hard labor.

Mother Cabrini invites people of Italian heritage to revisit our own histories in an authentic way. Revisiting our histories of immigration can, and I believe should, inspire people of Italian heritage, and others in general, to stand in solidarity with other peoples who face discrimination based on their arbitrarily, State-defined race and self-embraced religions.

Even if the General Assembly did not replace Columbus Day with a day honoring Mother Cabrini, I support removing Columbus Day as a State holiday.

Thank you, Rep. Benevidez, for standing for your ongoing efforts that culminate this year in HB20-103. Should my voice be helpful I am willing to speak in a Committee hearing or address the General Assembly.

Sincerely,

The Rev. Richard A. Gianzero

C: Hon. Steve O'Dorisio, Adams County Commissioner



Adrienne Benavidez &lt;adrienne4hd32@gmail.com&gt;

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**Letter in support of HB 20-1031**

2 messages

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**Erin McCarley** <erinmccarley@gmail.com>  
To: adrienne.benavidez.house@state.co.us

Sun, Feb 2, 2020 at 3:59 PM

February 2, 2020

Dear Representative Benavidez:

I am writing to thank you for sponsoring HB 20-1031. I'm pasting a letter below, which I have already sent to Amanda King along with my Senator and representative for my district. Please feel free to use this letter at your discretion, if it's helpful to your efforts in any way. Thank you, again, for all of your work on this matter.

Sincerely,

Erin McCarley  
Idledale, CO 80453

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Dear [Colorado legislator],

I am writing to you in support of HB 20-1031, introduced by Representative Adrienne Benavidez, to replace Columbus Day with Cabrini Day in the state of Colorado. As one of only 22 states that continues to recognize Columbus Day, I urge you as member of the Colorado legislature to abolish this holiday in support of addressing the inter-generational trauma that this holiday causes for the indigenous peoples of this state.

I'm a non-Native, European-American documentary filmmaker, photographer and journalist who has worked extensively with Native communities on several issues related to inter-generational trauma. These issues include but are limited to: the ongoing psychological trauma from US Boarding School era, the ongoing contamination of Native lands in the form of environmental racism, Indian mascots, Native youth depression and suicide, ongoing poverty from land dispossession, the epidemic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and girls, and the white-washing of US History in textbooks and schools.

I could easily give you a hundred arguments as to why Columbus was not a hero and should not be officially recognized as such, but I think it might be more relevant to tell you how I see the legacy of Christopher Columbus affecting Native communities today. Columbus does not just represent an historical trauma to many Native communities. His legacy is a present-day trauma. Why? Because the Doctrine of Discovery and the legacy of Manifest Destiny still form the basis of many of our legal, political and cultural institutions, and these doctrines are still legally, politically and cultural impacting Native communities today, in ways that can be considered as ongoing genocide.

We can measure historical genocide in term of people killed, land bases destroyed, and identities erased. We can point to millions of indigenous people killed, massacred and sold into slave trade in the Americas in the first centuries after Columbus arrived. We can also look at the US-Indian Wars of the 18th and 19th centuries that forcibly removed, massacred, starved, raped, took as prisoners and kidnapped Native men, women and children as a regular practice. We can look at the almost complete US seizure of the indigenous land base, which by 1955 had reduced indigenous lands to 2.3 percent of their original size in the United States.

The Columbus' legacy of genocide is not forgotten because it continues to play out today through the current seizures, contamination and destruction of treaty-protected lands-- from Bears Ears to Standing Rock just in the last few years. Diné (Navajo) communities are still dying from uranium contamination. Other indigenous nations die from rampant cancers from the fossil fuel industry. Water and air contamination threatens many nations, as many polluting industries have been strategically placed and abandoned on tribal lands. And still these lands are under threat by imminent domain, oil and gas exploration, and other corporations and industries.

As a demographic group, indigenous people still have the lowest life-expectancy of any ethnic group in the United States, and they suffer the highest rates of violence. There is the mass epidemic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, in which the number of deaths we don't even know because no federal agency has made it a priority to track them. We have Native communities still dealing with the trauma of being kidnapped and thrown into Boarding Schools in

the 1800s and 1900s, and then these boarding schools morphing into the US foster care system, which maintained a practice of taking Native children from their birth families and placing them in white families, which could aid in their cultural assimilation or ethnic cleansing. We still have the near total erasure of indigenous histories in our school textbooks and in our state colonial celebrations. As a culture, we widely accept Indian mascots in our schools, even though the word "Redskins" came from a time when Native people were massacred and skinned by US military and white settlers, and these bloody (red) skins were sold widely in stores for profit. And today, the biggest sports teams still proudly profit off this imagery.

I believe that in order to heal ongoing trauma, we have to start telling the truth. We have to start teaching fuller, deeper histories, in all their pain and ugliness. We can look at Germany's tremendous efforts to educate younger generations about the Holocaust or South Africa's efforts to educate young people about apartheid. Many countries that have survived such deep levels of atrocity no longer honor the "heroes" of genocide and ethnic cleansing. I find it deeply troubling that there has never been a national apology by a US President nor a national Truth and Reconciliation commission to begin to acknowledge and atone for the American Holocaust.

However, as a Colorado legislator, you have an opportunity today to take a first step in this state of Colorado, which sits on the ancestral homelands of the Cheyenne, Arapaho and Ute Nations. Abolishing Columbus Day is not enough, and it's only a beginning. But you can support the removal of this symbol of genocide that continues to torment and remind Native communities that even after centuries of genocide and dispossession, this country still treats them as if their lives, cultures and their histories do not matter. It's not about political correctness. It's about beginning doing the right thing. Please abolish this holiday. Replace with Cabrini Day or whatever you want. It's just time to move on from this horribly painful symbol.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Erin McCarley  
Idledale, CO 80453

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Adrienne Benavidez <adrienne4hd32@gmail.com>  
To: Erin McCarley <erinmccarley@gmail.com>

Mon, Feb 3, 2020 at 12:55 PM

Good Afternoon Erin,

Thank you for reaching out to me with these important perspectives regarding HB20-1031. Your inputs regarding the replacement of Columbus Day with a new State holiday are greatly appreciated and I will take them into consideration before voting. Thank you for being involved.

Sincerely,  
Representative Adrienne Benavidez, HD-32  
[Quoted text hidden]

To: Mr. Steve O'Dorisio

From: Patrick G Lubrano

Date : 01/29/2020

Subject: Columbus Day in Colorado

Dear Sir,

From the time I was born in New York in 1964 Columbus Day was instilled in my life. We celebrated this day ever since I can remember with an amazing parade to go with the holiday. When I was 18 I joined the Knights of Columbus as my Dad and Grand father did since their arrival in the United States in 1904. Columbus Day was also a time that we celebrated our amazing Italian culture and it means a lot to us to have this Holiday in our lives. I support leaving Columbus Day alone and not changing it to Indigenous people's day because it takes away from the Italian Community as a whole. The American -Italians helped build this country and it is not fair to exclude us as a people here in the U.S.

However, in the event that the loss of Columbus Day is inevitable due to political agendas I would support Cabrini Day here in Colorado. It has a lot of meaning to this state and to the Italian community. It allows us a chance to celebrate Cabrini who had a close relationship to Colorado and the Italian community. We should not have to be penalized for something that may or may not have happened in 1492. Today in 2020 I do support Mr. O' Dorisio's idea of putting Cabrini Day on the table. IT just makes perfect sense to treat the American Italians just like any other nationality. People from all over the world come to visit the Mother Cabrini Shrine that is on Lookout Mountain right here in Colorado.

As a Fourth Degree Knight of Columbus myself I was taught to give back to our communities no matter who they were. There is no color in poor or in poverty-stricken communities. Poor is poor in our eyes and is and always will be our sacred duty as Christians and Knights to help all of those in need. Personally, I found myself giving back my whole life even on the Native American land and for the 22 tribes in Arizona. I was a Detention Sergeant for the tribal Police in Maricopa, Arizona and I spent almost four years working the the Native American Basketball Invitational as a Security Director to protect the children whom came to play at the Phoenix Suns Arena. At the time I worked for the NBA Team and Nike to bring the NABI to life along with the Founder who by the way was Italian. Please consider Cabrini Day as a possibility if Columbus Day is going away and is inevitable. Allow the Italians to celebrate just like everyone else.

Respectfully submitted,

Patrick G. Lubrano

**Patrick G Lubrano**



Adrienne Benavidez &lt;adrienne4hd32@gmail.com&gt;

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**RE: H.B. 20-1031 (Replace Columbus Day with a New State Holiday)**

4 messages

David Stephenson &lt;david.thunderlaw@gmail.com&gt;

Mon, Feb 3, 2020 at 6:17 PM

To: chris.kennedy.house@state.co.us

Dear Representative Kennedy,

I write to you as one of your constituents in Colorado House District 23 and in your capacity as Chair of the State, Veterans & Military Affairs Committee to urge you to both vote in favor of the above-referenced Bill and to speak out strongly both publicly and privately to urge as many other members of your Committee and the House as you can to support this Bill.

I have lived in House District 23 (specifically in Lakewood, Colorado) and actively supported you and other Democrats for local, State, and national offices for many years. I have served the Democratic Party in a variety of ways over the years, including serving on the Democratic National Platform Committee and as a former Chair of the Downtown Denver Democratic Forum.

I have also long advocated zealously for the replacement of the Columbus Day holiday in Colorado with another holiday. The roots of my zealous support grow out of my deep roots in the place where you and I and our families live and my commitment to fostering the values shared by the people who have dedicated, sacrificed, lived, and lost their lives in this place that you and I share so that you and I and our children and grandchildren can struggle to continue to enjoy, nourish, and protect this wonderful place where a great plains meets a great mountain range on this magnificent continent between two great oceans on this fragile, exquisitely beautiful home to all peoples that we call Earth.

I am a native, third generation Coloradan, educated in Colorado's public schools, the recipient of a Ph.D. from your alma mater, the University of Colorado, and of a law degree from the University Denver. In those schools, I learned about the history of Colorado, the history of the United States, and the history of the original inhabitants--the native, indigenous peoples--of the places that we now call Lakewood, Colorado, and the USA and their encounters throughout the Western Hemisphere--and, really, throughout the world--with inhumane invaders, such Christopher Columbus, who have become senselessly, wrongfully enshrined by our institutions and laws. Specifically, as an Applied Anthropologist, I have lived and worked with and become a strong admirer of many of the descendants of those original inhabitants, and, as a lawyer, I have come to understand the rights of those original inhabitants under international human rights laws and how those rights have been tragically trampled upon.

I know that you know and have heard many of the compelling reasons why the Columbus Day holiday in Colorado should be replaced or repealed and why its replacement or repeal is long overdue. I will not reiterate those reasons in this email, but rest assured that I could write many dissertations and expound upon a parade of cogent arguments in support of its replacement or repeal. I only write now to let you know in as forceful a way as I can that one of your most loyal, long-time constituents strongly urges you as my representative, as a Committee Chair, and as Assistant Majority Leader in the House to bring to bear every kind of influence you can to support the above-referenced Bill and see that it has a successful journey through this legislative session.

Best regards,

*Dave*

Dave Stephenson  
3117 Owens Ct.  
Lakewood, CO 80215  
303-726-2259

THIS MESSAGE IS BEING SENT FROM THE LAW OFFICE OF DAVID J. STEPHENSON, JR., J.D., PH.D., D/B/A THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN THUNDER LAW FIRM.

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Adrienne Benavidez <adrienne4hd32@gmail.com>  
To: David Stephenson <david.thunderlaw@gmail.com>

Mon, Feb 3, 2020 at 6:26 PM

Thank you Dave. So eloquently stated!

Adrienne

Sent from my iPhone  
[Quoted text hidden]

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David Stephenson <david.thunderlaw@gmail.com>  
To: Adrienne Benavidez <adrienne4hd32@gmail.com>

Mon, Feb 3, 2020 at 7:04 PM

Thanks, Adrienne.

Best,

Dave  
[Quoted text hidden]

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David Stephenson <david.thunderlaw@gmail.com>  
To: Chris Kennedy <chris.kennedy.house@gmail.com>

Tue, Feb 4, 2020 at 10:08 AM

Hello Chris,

Thank you for your prompt, thoughtful response to my email from yesterday and strong endorsement of H.B. 20-1031 and for the other great, good work that you are doing and have done in the Colorado State legislature.

Please do not hesitate to call on me in the future to support the work that you are doing on behalf of the citizens of Colorado. I will make sure that I am signed up to receive your newsletter so that I can keep abreast of your legislative activities.

Best regards,  
Dave  
Dave Stephenson  
303-726-2259

On Tue, Feb 4, 2020 at 9:59 AM Chris Kennedy <chris.kennedy.house@gmail.com> wrote:

Dave,

Thank you so much for reaching out to me with your position on the Columbus Day repeal. I support replacing Columbus Day with another holiday for the reasons you share, among others. I appreciate your thoughtful perspective and intend to vote for the repeal of Columbus Day in Colorado. I have also been working to muster support from other legislators on this issue. I believe it is time for Colorado to make this historic change. Please don't hesitate to contact me with more of your thoughts, concerns, or questions.

Thank you again,  
Chris

P.S. if you'd like to keep up with what I'm working on at the Capitol, please sign up for my newsletter [here](#) (though it sounds like you already have - thank you for your support, Dave!)

Rep. Chris Kennedy  
House District 23 - Lakewood, CO  
303.866.2951

[Quoted text hidden]



Adrienne Benavidez &lt;adrienne4hd32@gmail.com&gt;

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**HB20-1301**

1 message

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**Alex Cobell** <alex.cobell@gmail.com>  
To: adrienne.benavidez.house@state.co.us

Tue, Feb 4, 2020 at 9:27 AM

Good morning Representative Benavidez,

I'm emailing support of HB20-1301 and a proposed amendment, replacing Columbus Day with Cabrini Day. Thank you for introducing this bill. As a Coloradan with complicated ancestry, my mother is Italian-American and my father was born and raised on the Blackfeet reservation in Montana, my feelings toward Columbus Day have also been complicated. I personally do not believe the celebration of someone's heritage needs to come at the expense of our fellow Coloradans. The fact is Christopher Columbus never set foot in the United States and made no contribution to the lives of Italian-Americans. He did, however, cause great harm to the Native populations where he went. For Native people, Columbus is a symbol of genocide and having a state-sanctioned celebration of him is quite harmful. I would prefer the day be replaced with the celebration of an Italian-American, like Mother Frances Cabrini, who actually lived in state and made a positive impact on the lives of Coloradans. I am proud of my Italian heritage and I am proud of my Native heritage, and I do not want to see the state continue to tie itself in knots trying to arbitrate this outdated holiday. I believe this bill is a reasonable and equitable solution to the problem.

Thank you,

Alex Cobell  
Denver, CO (HD4)  
(303) 359-8226  
alex.cobell@gmail.com