

My name is Gina Franciamore-Knaack, and I am president of Sons of Italy Lodge 2870 in Colorado Springs. I am here representing my fellow lodge members and myself. My children are 25% Native American, members of the Adai Caddo tribe of Louisiana, so please know that my decision to encourage a no vote on this bill was a difficult one. After conducting many hours of research and lots of soul searching, I can say with a clear conscience that Columbus, while not innocent of wrongdoing, still deserves to be commemorated with a holiday in Colorado.

My primary sources for this speech are Dr. William Connell's article "What Columbus Day Really Means" and phone interviews I conducted with him on Monday and Tuesday, May 1 and 2. Dr. Connell is an Italian and Renaissance history professor at Seton Hall University who has written several books and articles about Christopher Columbus. Additionally, in Illinois Dr. Connell assisted the governor in creating a coalition which brought Italian-Americans and Native Americans together face to face to discuss their differences. After several meetings, the end result was both groups marching together again in the Columbus Day Parade.

To quote Dr. Connell, "When thinking about the Columbus Day holiday, it helps to remember the good intentions of the people who put together the first parade in New York. Columbus Day was first proclaimed a national holiday by President Benjamin Harrison in 1892, 400 years after Columbus's first voyage. The idea, lost on present-day critics of the holiday, was that this would be a national holiday that would be special for recognizing both Native Americans, who were here before Columbus, and the many immigrants-including Italians-who were just then coming to this country in astounding numbers. It was to be a national holiday that was not about the Founding Fathers or the Civil War, but about the rest of American history."

Dr. Connell continues, "Whenever I hear of protests about the Columbus Day holiday, protests that tend to pit Native Americans against Italian Americans, I remember these tragedies that occurred so soon before the first Columbus Day holiday, and I shake my head." (The tragedies to which Dr. Connell is referring is the massacre at Wounded Knee and the mass hanging of Italians in New Orleans, incidences which happened just 10 weeks apart.) "President Harrison did not allude to either of these sad episodes in his proclamation of the holiday, but the idea for the holiday involved a vision of an America that would get beyond the prejudice that had led to these deaths. Columbus Day was supposed to recognize the greatness of all of America's people, but especially Italians and Native Americans."

The first Columbus Day parade in New York, and many that followed, included public school students, Italians, Native Americans, Jews, military drill squads and several bands all marching together. The fact that the Native Americans marched right alongside the Dante Alighieri School speaks volumes about the spirit of the original Columbus Day.

I'd like to close with one final quote from Dr. Connell, "So Columbus Day is for all Americans. It marks the first encounter that brought together the original Americans and the future ones. A lot of suffering followed, and a lot of achievement too. That a special role has be reserved for Italians in keeping the parades and commemoration alive for well over a century seems right, since Columbus was Italian..."

So let's continue to commemorate Columbus Day – a holiday for *all* Americans. Thank you for your time. Please vote no on 1327.