

April 26, 2017

Honorable Chair, members of the committee, I thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Richard SaBell, I am a father, a grandfather, and an American citizen. I am also the Colorado Chair for the Commission for Social Justice, Vice President for the Sons of Italy, Grand Lodge of Colorado, a member of the Italian American Business Association, and a Past President (2009-2013) for the Columbus Day Parade Committee and I oppose this bill on every level.

First and foremost, I oppose this Bill for the complete lack of legitimate documentation by Representative Salazar for any of his hateful comments and accusations against Columbus. Bartolome de las Casas, eight years old in 1492, when Columbus made his first voyage, has never been considered a credible historian and was certainly not an eyewitness, never having sailed with Columbus nor having ever met him.

Secondly, Representative Salazar uses Columbus' diary comments out of context in an attempt to create a misperception of Columbus intentions toward the Taino people. This is reckless scholarship at best and outright slander at worst. Slander of Columbus is as offensive to Italian Americans as slander of Martin Luther King or St. Patrick would be to their respective communities.

In fact, the complete lack of any scholarly integrity of any part of Representative Salazar's Bill is disturbing in that there seems no standard of accountability. Maybe some of the fault also lies with poor advice from "Expert Witness" Glen Morris. It should be noted that Professor Morris is not a history professor, but rather a Political Science Professor and I question his qualification as an expert witness in this matter. A legitimate expert witness would know that the supporting documentation for HB17-1327 does not pass for anything more than hearsay. I wonder if Professor Morris would be so forgiving if one of his students were to submit such a poorly documented paper. I know that Thom Noel, my CU "History" Professor would not.

In conclusion, I oppose this Bill because I believe it is a direct attack against Italian American Heritage and the Italian American community in general. The attempt to repeal Columbus Day again this year, after having failed to pass a similar Bill last year, along with the surrounding dialogue, reveals a single-minded pattern of harassment of the Italian American community. That being said, the ACLU has also been petitioned to examine this matter in depth, as well as any potential conflict of interest issues.

Thank you for your time.