



Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation
Government Center

TESTIMONY OF
JOSEPH RUPNICK, CHAIRMAN
PRAIRIE BAND POTAWATOMI NATION

BEFORE
KANSAS HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FEDERAL AND STATE AFFAIRS
ON "AUTHORIZING THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY TO CONVEY CERTAIN REAL
PROPERTY TO THE SHAWNEE TRIBE."
HB 2208

JANUARY 24, 2023

Good morning, Madam Chair Carpenter, Vice Chair Kessler Ranking Member Hoye, and distinguished members of the committee. My name is Joseph Rupnick and I serve as the Chairman of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation. I am a veteran of the United States Calvary and I represent approximately 4,500 Potawatomi people living mostly on our reservation in Kansas defined by our 1846 Treaty with the United States government.

I am honored to submit to you today my testimony regarding the conveyance of certain real property to the Shawnee Tribe and I offer the submission of my testimony in support of conveyance.

As many of you are aware, the Shawnee Tribe along with many other tribes were moved to present day Kansas. The Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation, using funds from lands we ceded to the United States in Illinois and Iowa, purchased a 30 x 30 square mile reservation in present day Kansas in 1846 and we have resided here since that time.

The history between the Tribes, U.S. Government, and State is one of differing views. For Native Americans, the history has been very welcoming, followed by opposition, defeat, and near-extinction. To the Europeans and American settlers, it has included everything from treatment as equals (or near-equals) to assimilation to exile to near-genocide. Tribes were considered equal (or near equal) when the Federal Government entered into Treaties, recognizing Tribes

as sovereign Nations. Article VI of the U.S. Constitution defines this in the second paragraph stating, “and all Treaties made, or which shall be made, under the authority of the United States, shall be the supreme Law of the Land;”. Many of those Treaties contained language for the establishment of schools for Native kids and this is the case with Shawnee Mission. Initially built close to Shawnee lands to comply with the treaties, to teach Native Children from 22 different tribes in the area. In an effort to assimilate Native Children, the mission evolved into a manual labor school as the name implies. Children from the different Tribes were forced to build the buildings and as a result of the manual labor and poor conditions, many perished and are laid to rest there.

As I stated earlier, the Prairie Band of Potawatomi Nation support the conveyance of the lands to a Tribe with the hopes that Tribes are consulted on any activities today. That Activities conducted on the property do not disrespect our departed ancestors. It has been reported to us that members of the community are conducting “seances” on the property and we would ask that a complete halt to any other activity that goes against our beliefs. Finally, we believe that this area conveyed would remain gaming ineligible.

In conclusion, I want to thank you again Mr. Chair and committee members for the opportunity to submit my testimony today. For 50 years, the official policy of the U.S. Congress has been to support tribal sovereignty and self-determination. More must be done to make this a reality and this bill is one small step in the right direction to correct an historical wrong.