

Proponent Testimony for Kansas State License Plate Honoring the Buffalo Soldiers

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Migrating birds darkened the sky. Massive herds of buffalo, crossing the open plains of what would become the Great State of Kansas, darkened the earth below. The hooves of the mighty American Bison churned the soil beneath them creating fertile bounty and new life. In times past these mighty migrating herds numbered in the tens of millions and were a major support system for the indigenous inhabitants of these lands, living in harmony and dependent on these mighty beasts for food, fuel, clothing, shelter, tools and many other items necessary for life in this land.

Not only is this iconic animal the official state mammal of the state of Kansas since 1955, the buffalo is also reflected on the Kansas state flag and seal. It was featured on the U.S. bicentennial Kansas commemorative quarter in 2005 and became the national mammal in 2016. This magnificent animal is also the largest land mammal in the western hemisphere standing six feet tall and over a ton in weight that can outrun a horse.

With the American Bison so well recognized and respected in indigenous cultures as well as our own, it is remarkable that only one special group ever carried these magnificent animals name as its own. The Buffalo Soldiers.

On 28 July 1866, the Army Reorganization Act set in motion the path of the Buffalo Soldiers in American history and the imagination of the world. Looking for the heroes of the Old West, the Western Frontier, and the Taming of the Old West it appears that these soldiers were headed for dissolution in the records of history. To the credit of the

veterans that both suffered and prospered under this nickname they never let the contributions of these unique American soldiers fade from memory.

The WWII veterans from Leavenworth and Kansas City organized the world's first Buffalo Soldier chapter on 28 July 1966, one hundred years to the day after the 1866 Army Reorganization Act that led to this distinguished and proud group. In executing this first charter they led the way to the formation of the 9th & 10th (Horse) Cavalry Association, a national organization galvanized to perpetuate the memory and its service to this great nation.

It is true that American history started in the east, it is also absolutely true that America became great in Kansas. The Buffalo Soldiers were part of making that history possible starting in September 1866 with the famed 10th Cavalry formed at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas and moving further into the heart of Kansas in August 1867 to Fort Riley. These troops were the first African American soldiers to engage in battle with Native Americans twice while in troop movements to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas during the Indian Wars.

Today, we continue to serve our nation and its valued history by working in a public/private partnership with the U.S. Army, the Army Center of Military History and Fort Leavenworth, Kansas to fund, construct and install an entirely new and reimagined Frontier Army Museum. This standing tribute to the contributions and central importance of Fort Leavenworth and the state of Kansas will showcase the incredible significance it has made to world history and the posterity of the United States of America.

This unique combined effort will produce an entirely new and exciting destination at Fort Leavenworth, on federal land but outside the gates and fence line for greater public access, drawing visitors near and far to Kansas and Fort Leavenworth. This museum will honor the Buffalo Soldiers and coordinate with the Buffalo Soldiers Monument and Circle of Firsts started by the late General and Secretary of State, Colin Powell.

The state of Kansas honoring the Buffalo Soldiers with a license plate featuring these unique soldiers will be a distinction unlike any other in their long history. I am here in support of the creation of a Kansas state license plate bestowing recognition on these soldiers that fought discrimination and for a better life for all from the Indian Wars until Korea when full integration put to rest the Buffalo Soldiers.

I support the initiative to have the Buffalo Soldiers featured on Kansas license plates as an oral historian, a veteran and a direct descendant of an original Buffalo Soldier who following release from slavery enlisted in the 38th Infantry on May 6, 1867 and later serving with the 9th Cavalry. My great grandfather, Pvt. Isaac Johnson, while stationed at Fort Harker, Kansas was detailed to guard the U.S. mail to New Mexico. His detachment fell under surprise attack at Cow Creek Crossing along the Santa Fe Trail in Rice County, four miles west of Lyons, Kansas. He survived the attack but was wounded in his right shoulder. Nevertheless, he continued his mission for another 452 miles to Fort Union, New Mexico where he received proper medical care.

This is but one isolated example of the valor and sacrifice of these sometime under represented patriots of Kansas history and that of America. This is a recognition that supports the unity of understanding the contributions of all Americans in making America the greatest nation in the history of the world. I therefore, urge the Kansas Senate Transportation Committee under the leadership of Chairman Mike Peterson to make this initiative a reality. I urge your approval of the creation of a Kansas state Buffalo Soldier license plate.