

COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

CHAIR

- Public Safety and Health

MEMBER

- Community and Economic Development
- Steering and Rules
- Anti-Graffiti Policy



ROBERT G. DONOVAN
ALDERMAN, 8TH DISTRICT

Erasing Columbus Day is not the best way to honor indigenous people

**Statement from Alderman Bob Donovan
October 8, 2019**

I am informed that Governor Evers intends to declare the second Monday in October to be Indigenous Peoples' Day throughout the State of Wisconsin. Last week, the Community and Economic Development Committee unanimously recommended a resolution proclaiming the same for the City of Milwaukee. As a member of that committee, I joined my colleagues in support of the latter measure. Since then, however, I've had second thoughts.

Let me make myself plain: I have no objection to recognizing and honoring North America's indigenous people both in and of themselves and in light of their historical struggles. I can find no merit, however, in doing this at the expense of other historical figures and other communities.

By way of background, this country has celebrated Columbus Day since April 1934 when the Congress and President Franklin Roosevelt, formalizing decades of past practice, proclaimed it a federal holiday and determined that it would fall on October 12 each year.

President Lyndon Johnson, in 1968, signed legislation that moved its regular observance to the second Monday in October.

And for generations young people were taught to honor Columbus' spirit of adventure, his courage, and his determination in face of adversity.

Now it would seem he is being made the scapegoat for the many wrongs suffered by the indigenous people of North America. The bill's sponsors know they cannot change a federal holiday so they have chosen to make a statement that, quite honestly, is of little substance. Columbus Day is not a City holiday and, at least in my memory, we as a City have done little if anything to observe it. I might note in passing that Council unity of this type might have been better spent on solving the deep problems presented to us in the mayor's proposed budget, but that's for another time.

-More-

City Hall Room 205 • 200 East Wells Street • Milwaukee, WI 53202

PHONE (414) 286-3533

FAX (414) 286-3456

E-MAIL rdonov@milwaukee.gov

WEBSITE www.milwaukee.gov/district8



But this is a time of symbolism and rage. It is also a time too often filled with weird animosity toward the heroes of our past. In the name of righting wrongs, real and perceived, we turn those too long dead to defend themselves from heroes to villains and deny them even the dignity of being seen as the flawed human beings they were. This makes for poor public policy and even poorer history. I shudder to think how any of us will be judged under these new standards of moral rectitude.

I predict this resolution will pass and the Mayor will sign it. Those who favor it will gather and congratulate themselves on their virtue. For my own part, I will, on the second Monday in October, remember the Genoese explorer who took three ships into the West and changed the world forever.

-30-

