

My name is Evelyn Kocher and I live in North Portland in Multnomah County. I am here to testify in favor of HCR 11, which I previously had testified for in the House Committee on Rules under a different name.

When I was still at college in 2017, I was the senior drum major for the Oregon State University Marching Band. Due to a change of style with a new incoming band director as well as the impending 125th anniversary of the band's founding, the organization was on the lookout for older classic school songs that had fallen out of fashion to bring back to light. Inspired (ironically) by the news of the University of Maryland Marching Band and the Maryland state song, I decided to look up the state song that represented Oregon, which, despite having a longstanding interest in geographical and historical facts and symbols, I had never heard of in my entire life. The tune sounded regal and unique, and I sent a YouTube link to my band director.

Later, at rehearsal, I followed up with him about the email and he told me that, though the music itself was intriguing, that the band couldn't be associated with a song with those lyrics. I was somewhat shocked, and was even more so when I looked up the song and read the lyrics more closely. I decided that I wanted to fight to change either the lyrics to the song or the entire song itself to a symbol that I would be more proud of as an Oregonian of color. The song, after all, was written independently of the lyrics, and could, therefore, be changed without changing the intended meaning of state pride.

In January of that year, I landed an internship with Representative Hernandez during the Oregon Legislature's short session of 2018. The issue of the state song was one of the causes I was most passionate about, and I managed to have a meeting with Rep. Schouten based on her sponsorship of the failed bill in the previous legislative session. Through her, I met Amy and created the Facebook page, determined to get the message out.

As a musician, I know that the symbols that we choose to represent us are powerful and reflect the morals that we value and choose to display to the world; recent events involving the Confederate battle flag only serve to confirm the power of symbols and the empowerment that comes with rejecting ones that are painful memories of harder times. As an Oregonian of color, I am ashamed that the piece of music that represents me lauds the achievements of "free men" that are "fairest and the best" "conquer[ing] and [holding]" the place where I grew up and where I call home. I shudder to think of the many Native American Oregonians who have had to learn that the lands that they have lived upon since time immemorial was sanctified institutionally as being "blest by the blood of martyrs," as if Oregon's history only began when outsiders came to witness it.

Oregon deserves a better piece of music to represent the beauty of her lands, the soul of her people, and the diversity that has been a part of her history since the very beginning, from the confederations of Native American tribes that lived here since time immemorial, to the multinational origins of the first pioneers, and to the many Black Americans who have, against all odds, carved out niches here for decades in a state that has tried to stamp them out at every turn. Oregonians deserve so much better than a song that purports to be one of our state's official symbols but does nothing more than institutionalize Oregon's sad and painful history of white supremacy. We deserve a symbol to be held up as something that truly represents us instead of something that we sweep under the rug as an embarrassment or an afterthought due to its reprehensibility. Now, more than ever, we need a true symbol of Oregon.

I urge you to vote yes on HCR 11. Thank you for your time and I very dearly hope that we can use this upcoming session to show all Oregonians that we will no longer stand for a symbol that doesn't represent who we are.