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Representative Dr. Ponka-We Victors-Cozad Rejects Representative Wheeler's Apology for Racially Insensitive Comment

On March 23, 2022 was a monumental moment in history when I presided over the Kansas House of Representatives but the occasion was marred with a racially insensitive comment made by Representative John Wheeler. These remarks had no relevance in our sacred House chamber, to the business at hand, other than to instigate mockery towards myself and the Native people that I represent throughout the country. Representative Wheeler was elected by his constituents (some of whom may also be of Native American descent) to be an upstanding delegate and leader of their voice. He blatantly abused his power to mock another culture with a slanderous remark in an attempt for satire. This behavior is unacceptable and cannot be tolerated in our Kansas Legislature.

This marks two recent incidents where Native Americans have been disrespected in Kansas. When will the elected leaders in Kansas learn to respect Native American culture and their economic contributions to our state? Many Kansas tribes and nations contribute revenue to our state economy through gaming and other business ventures, while providing much needed jobs. However, Representative Wheeler had the audacity to mock the same people that continually support and fund state progress.

I do not mock or devalue Representative Wheeler's religion, place of worship, or culture. Therefore, I expect the same reverence and respect he shows towards his religion and culture towards all Kansans. I would like to think our elected public officials would know and understand this principle. This is Women's history month and I am a proud Native American mother making history for the state of Kansas and Representative Wheeler did his best to tarnish these accomplishments.

I firmly hold him accountable to his words and actions. I do not accept Representative Wheeler's disingenuous apology. We as members of this legislative branch cannot allow this behavior to be tolerated without consequence in the people's house.

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