

# Human and Civil Rights Award Winner



Alex Red Corn

Wilma Mankiller Memorial Award

## **"JUST AS OUR ANCESTORS HAVE ALWAYS DONE, WE ARE PERSISTENT IN ASSERTING OUR RIGHTS TO EXIST AS A PEOPLE.**

Our persistence must triumph [over] the pernicious status quos we are constantly enduring because our future depends on it. So we press on," explains Dr. Alex Red Corn, an enrolled citizen of the Osage Nation who works as an activist, advocate, and university educator in Kansas.

As an activist, Dr. Red Corn has organized students, colleagues, and community members to establish a growing Indigenous Peoples Day event. He also testified to the Kansas legislature to dispel myths and historical inaccuracies regarding the American Indian community. HB2009 sought to change "Columbus Day" to "Indigenous Peoples Day."

Dr. Red Corn presented to the Kansas State Board of Education on the harmful use of Native mascots. His work resulted in the Board's vote to make a "strong recommendation" that school districts in Kansas retire the use of American Indian mascots and imagery. However, he has made it clear that these steps are only the first that need to be taken to ensure equity for Native students across Kansas and the country.

In addition to his full-time university position as Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership and Coordinator for Indigenous Partnerships, he serves as Executive Director of the Kansas Association for Native American Education (KANAE). The mission of KANAE "is to support, promote, and advocate for the unique educational needs of American Indian/Alaska Native students, families, nations and educators in Kansas." Dr. Red Corn has fostered a growing relationship between Kansas NEA and KANAE. Kansas NEA Executive Director Kevin Riemann describes this relationship: "As the partnership between Kansas NEA and the Kansas Association of Native American Education has grown, so has our respect for the leadership of Dr. Red Corn. Dr. Red Corn has provided significant expertise and resources to our leaders and educators as we navigate correcting so many wrongs our society has inflicted upon our Native peoples."

Dr. Red Corn shared his journey in a documentary entitled *A Walk in My Shoes*. As a child, he knew he was Osage but looked "white" and "blonde," which was "confusing." Through high school and college, he continued to explore his heritage and found connections to enrich his understanding of his tribal identity. His passion for preserving the history of his people grew, and his want to effect change led to his decision to become a teacher. His documentary begins with a quote by Cherokee Nation Chief Wilma Mankiller: "I don't think anybody anywhere can talk about the future of their people or of an organization without talking about education." Dr. Red Corn lives by this belief in his work to uplift the needs of Native communities nationwide.