

My name is John Righetti and I am the president emeritus of the National Carpatho-Rusyn Society, the largest exclusively cultural Carpatho-Rusyn organization in the world, with two chapters in Ohio—Cleveland and Youngstown-Warren. I have also served for nearly a decade as the North American representative to the World Council of Rusyns based in Presov, Slovakia. It is the international council that coordinates Carpatho-Rusyn cultural activity among the Carpatho-Rusyn organizations in several homeland countries and the United States and Canada.

I am writing in support of Senate Bill 261 for the creation of an Eastern European Commission and an Office of Eastern European Affairs for the State of Ohio.

One out of every ten Ohio citizens is of East European extraction. One out of every ten. Ten percent of the population. Yet what do Ohioans know about East Europeans' rich cultures—not beliefs and practices left behind in our stateless homeland, but ones that we still practice and cherish in our communities and our homes; far beyond quaint traditions... value systems and decision making based on our cultural norms.

East Europeans have contributed in enormous ways that the public does not know...ways that have changed all of our lives in society. Let me cite just 3... three Carpatho-Rusyn American men and how all of our lives have been changed forever because of them.

Andy Warhol—not only revolutionized the art world but through it, changed popular culture forever.

Nick Holonyak – created LED technology' the foundation for our digital world.

Mika Popovic – identified the AIDS virus and worked on the first medicines to treat it.

Did you know about these incredible contributions? Did you know these American men were of east European heritage? Did you even know Carpatho-Rusyns existed? My point here is that East European Americans and their contributions to American culture have largely gone unrecognized. We learn in school the accomplishments of Americans with heritage in northwestern Europe as founders of democracy and inventors. But really nothing about East Europeans. And today, our children learn about the significant contributions of African Americans and learn the rich culture of Hispanic Americans. But what do we and our children learn about East European American's contributions and culture?

The state of Ohio can change that. Ohio can change that for every citizen of Ohio...by creating an Eastern European Commission...one that is charged with communication with Ohio's East European community...one charged with creating public and educational strategies to make Ohio and its residents aware of this meaningful component of Ohio citizenry and their cultures.

Ohio can be on the forefront of investing in its East European community just as it has in northwest Europeans, African-Americans, Hispanics and Asians. It cannot only develop a meaningful relationship with its East European citizenry... it can lead the way for the nation.

Thank you.

John J. Righetti

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