

HISTORIC RESOLUTION OF APOLOGY TO NATIVE PEOPLES  
INTRODUCED IN U.S. CONGRESS  
May 6, 2004

An historic Resolution of Apology to the Native American peoples was introduced in the U.S. Congress by Senators Sam Brownback (R-KS), Ben Nighthorse Campbell (R-CO) and Daniel K. Inouye (D-HI) on the evening of the May 6, 2004, National Day of Prayer.

In his remarks on the Senate floor, Sen. Brownback stated, "This is a resolution of apology and a resolution of reconciliation. It is a first step toward healing the wounds that have divided us for so long—a potential foundation for a new era of positive relations between Tribal Governments and the Federal Government. Before reconciliation, there must be recognition and repentance. Before there is a durable relationship, there must be understanding. This resolution will not authorize or serve as a settlement of any claim against the United States, nor will it resolve the many challenges still facing the Native Peoples. But it does recognize the negative impact of numerous deleterious Federal acts and policies on Native Americans and their cultures."

Senator Brownback and the initiators of this Resolution are asking for concerted prayer and action that many Senators will quickly sign on as co-sponsors, that it will be passed by both chambers and acted on by President George W. Bush (see Section 1 - (6) of the Resolution) before the September 21, 2004 formal opening of the new National Museum of the American Indian which is nearing completion on the Mall in Washington, DC.

You can prayerfully "track" the progress of this Joint Resolution by visiting the Library of Congress website and typing in the Bill Number, S.J. Res. 37.

JOINT RESOLUTION OF APOLOGY TO NATIVE PEOPLES INTRODUCED IN THE UNITED STATES SENATE MAY 6, 2004

REMARKS ON SENATE FLOOR AND TEXT OF RESOLUTION S.J. RES. 37

>From the Congressional Record, May 6, 2004

MR. BROWNBACK. Mr. President, I rise today to introduce before this body a joint resolution that seeks to address an issue that has long lain unresolved. That issue is our Nation's relationship with the Native peoples of this land.

Long before 1776 and the establishment of the United States of America, this land was inhabited by numerous nations. Like our Nation, many of these peoples held a strong belief in the Creator and maintained a powerful spiritual connection to this land. Since the formation of the American Republic, there have most certainly been numerous conflicts between our Government and many of these Tribes--conflicts in which warriors on all sides fought courageously and in which all sides suffered. However, even from the earliest days of the Republic, there existed a sentiment that honorable dealings and peaceful coexistence were preferable to bloodshed. Indeed, our predecessors in Congress in

1787 stated in the Northwest Ordinance, ``The utmost good faith shall always be observed toward the Indians.''

Many treaties were made between this Republic and the American Indian Tribes. Treaties, as my colleagues in this Chamber know, are far more than words in a page. Treaties are our word, our bond. Treaties with other governments are not to be treated lightly. Unfortunately, too often the United States of America did not uphold its responsibilities as stated in its covenants with the Native American Tribes. Too often, our Government broke its oaths to the Native peoples.

I want my fellow Senators to know that this resolution does not dismiss the valiance of our American soldiers who bravely fought for their families in wars between the United States and different Indian Tribes. Nor does this resolution cast all the blame for the various battles on one side or another. What this resolution does do is recognize and honor the importance of Native Americans to this land and to our Nation--in the past and today--and offers an official apology to the Native peoples for the poor and painful choices our Government sometimes made to disregard its solemn word.

This is a resolution of apology and a resolution of reconciliation. It is a first step toward healing the wounds that have divided us for so long--a potential foundation for a new era of positive relations between Tribal governments and the Federal Government. It is time--it is past time--for us to heal our land of division, all divisions, and bring us together as one people.

Before reconciliation, there must be recognition and repentance. Before there is a durable relationship, there must be understanding. This resolution will not authorize or serve as a settlement of any claim against the United States, nor will it resolve the many challenges still facing the Native peoples. But it does recognize the negative impact of numerous deleterious Federal acts and policies on Native Americans and their cultures.

Moreover, it begins the effort of reconciliation by recognizing the past wrongs and repenting for them.

Martin Luther King, a true reconciler, once said, ``The end is reconciliation, the end is redemption, the end is the creation of the beloved community.''

This resolution is not the end. But, perhaps it signals the beginning of the end of division and the faint first light and first fruits of the creation of beloved community.

I have worked with the chairman and ranking member of the Indian Affairs Committee, Senator Campbell and Senator Inouye, in the crafting of this resolution, I also reached out to the Native Tribes as this bill was being formed, and I continue to receive helpful and supportive feedback. I ask that my colleagues in this Chamber, and those in the House of Representatives, join together in support of this important resolution.

I ask unanimous consent that the text of the joint resolution be printed in the Record.

There being no objection, the joint resolution was ordered to be printed in the Record, as follows:

JOINT RESOLUTION - S.J. Res. 37

To acknowledge a long history of official depredations and ill-conceived policies by the United States Government regarding Indian Tribes and offer an apology to all Native Peoples on behalf of the United States.

Whereas the ancestors of today's Native Peoples inhabited the land of the present-day United States since time immemorial and for thousands of years before the arrival of peoples of European descent;

Whereas the Native Peoples have for millennia honored, protected, and stewarded this land we cherish;

Whereas the Native Peoples are spiritual peoples with a deep and abiding belief in the Creator, and for millennia their peoples have maintained a powerful spiritual connection to this land, as is evidenced by their customs and legends;

Whereas the arrival of Europeans in North America opened a new chapter in the histories of the Native Peoples;

Whereas, while establishment of permanent European settlements in North America did stir conflict with nearby Indian Tribes, peaceful and mutually beneficial interactions also took place;

Whereas the foundational English settlements in Jamestown, Virginia, and Plymouth, Massachusetts, owed their survival in large measure to the compassion and aid of the Native Peoples in their vicinities;

Whereas in the infancy of the United States, the founders of the Republic expressed their desire for a just relationship with the Indian Tribes, as evidenced by the Northwest Ordinance enacted by Congress in 1787, which begins with the phrase, ``The utmost good faith shall always be observed toward the Indians'';

Whereas Indian Tribes provided great assistance to the fledgling Republic as it strengthened and grew, including invaluable help to Meriwether Lewis and William Clark on their epic journey from St. Louis, Missouri, to the Pacific Coast; >

Whereas Native Peoples and non-Native settlers engaged in numerous armed conflicts;

Whereas the United States Government violated many of the treaties ratified by Congress and other diplomatic agreements with Indian Tribes;

Whereas this Nation should address the broken treaties and many of the more ill-conceived Federal policies that followed, such as extermination, termination, forced removal and relocation, the outlawing of traditional religions, and the destruction of sacred places;

Whereas the United States forced Indian Tribes and their citizens to move away from their traditional homelands and onto federally established and controlled reservations, in accordance with such Acts as the Indian Removal Act of 1830;

Whereas many Native Peoples suffered and perished--

(1) during the execution of the official United States Government policy of forced removal, including the infamous Trail of Tears and Long Walk;

(2) during bloody armed confrontations and massacres, such as the Sand Creek Massacre in 1864 and the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890; and

(3) on numerous Indian reservations;

Whereas the United States Government condemned the traditions, beliefs, and customs of the Native Peoples and endeavored to assimilate them by such policies as the redistribution of land under the General Allotment Act of 1887 and the forcible removal of Native children from their families to faraway boarding schools where their Native practices and languages were degraded and forbidden;

Whereas officials of the United States Government and private United States citizens harmed Native Peoples by the unlawful acquisition of recognized Tribal land, the theft of resources from such territories, and the mismanagement of Tribal trust funds;

Whereas the policies of the United States Government toward Indian Tribes and the breaking of covenants with Indian Tribes have contributed to the severe social ills and economic troubles in many Native communities today;

Whereas, despite continuing maltreatment of Native Peoples by the United States, the Native Peoples have remained committed to the protection of this great land, as evidenced by the fact that, on a per capita basis, more Native people have served in the United States Armed Forces and placed themselves in harm's way in defense of the United States in every major military conflict than any other ethnic group;

Whereas Indian Tribes have actively influenced the public life of the United States by continued cooperation with Congress and the Department of the Interior, through the involvement of Native individuals in official United States Government positions, and by leadership of their own sovereign Indian Tribes;

Whereas Indian Tribes are resilient and determined to preserve, develop, and transmit to future generations their unique cultural identities;

Whereas the National Museum of the American Indian was established within the Smithsonian Institution as a living memorial to the Native Peoples and their traditions; and

Whereas Native Peoples are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, and that among those are life, liberty, and the pursuit of

happiness: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND APOLOGY.

The United States, acting through Congress--

(1) recognizes the special legal and political relationship the Indian Tribes have with the United States and the solemn covenant with the land we share;

(2) commends and honors the Native Peoples for the thousands of years that they have stewarded and protected this land;

(3) acknowledges years of official depredations, ill-conceived policies, and the breaking of covenants by the United States Government regarding Indian Tribes; >

(4) apologizes on behalf of the people of the United States to all Native Peoples for the many instances of violence, maltreatment, and neglect inflicted on Native Peoples by citizens of the United States;

(5) expresses its regret for the ramifications of former offenses and its commitment to build on the positive relationships of the past and present to move toward a brighter future where all the people of this land live reconciled as brothers and sisters, and harmoniously steward and protect this land together;

(6) urges the President to acknowledge the offenses of the United States against Indian Tribes in the history of the United States in order to bring healing to this land by providing a proper foundation for reconciliation between the United States and Indian Tribes; and

(7) commends the State governments that have begun reconciliation efforts with recognized Indian Tribes located in their boundaries and encourages all State governments similarly to work toward reconciling relationships with Indian Tribes within their boundaries.

SEC. 2. DISCLAIMER.

Nothing in this Joint Resolution authorizes any claim against the United States or serves as a settlement of any claim against the United States.