



Observing Columbus Day: Legislative Resolutions

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The State of Montana in House Joint Resolution 32 enacted a bill urging Montanans to affirm the cultural contributions of Native Americans on October 12, 1992, the observance of Columbus day. (See HJR 32, below.) The bill was introduced by the three Native American legislators and supported by the House and Senate.

This legislative action provided the Native American population in Montana to be heard concerning our views of the 500th anniversary of the “discovery” of North America. We have little to celebrate on this day which has historic significance for the majority population in the United States. For the indigenous people of America, this date is only a reminder of what has been lost and the beginning of the genocide of our race. I have often wondered why the European-Americans seem so persistent in creating historical heroes, such as Christopher Columbus, and in celebrating their mythical values for centuries. Columbus is not our hero, nor do we believe that he discovered our lands.

We are proud that the State of Montana will observe and recognize Native American contributions, affirm their commitment to honoring Indian treaties, and respect the inherent sovereignty, dignity, and cultural uniqueness of this nation’s first Americans.

On a national basis, Senate Joint Resolution 222 is, at this writing, before the 102nd Congress to designate 1992 as the “Year of Reconciliation between American Indians and non-Indians.” The Joint Resolution offers the opportunity for the United States to honor the indigenous peoples of this continent, to develop trust and respect between American Indians and non-Indians, and to celebrate our cultural differences. The resolution would authorize the President to issue a proclamation calling upon both Indians and non-Indians to lay aside fears and mistrust of one another, to build friendships, to join together and take part in shared

cultural activities, and to strive toward mutual respect and understanding. (See S.J. Res 222, below.)

The following testimony was presented by Chairman Caleb Shields of the Assiniboine-Sioux Tribes of the Fort Peck Agency:

Generally, the Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of the Fort Peck Reservation support the overall intent of S.J. Res 222, to Designate 1992 as the Year of Reconciliation Between American Indians and non-Indians. It comes at a time when there are other resolutions addressing American Indians—the designation of the year of the American Indian, the recognition of the nation’s common American Indian

heritage, and a proclamation honoring American Indian veterans. Legislation to designate the year of the Indian child is expected to be introduced....Taken together, these proposals enhance the awareness of all Americans with regard to the nation's first inhabitants.

But our support for 5.1. Res 222 must be tempered with caution, for the important symbolic message of such a resolution must never be allowed to be a substitute for substance. In 1992, American Indians will fight to reassert our rights to worship in our own ways, and to claim and protect our sacred lands. In 1992, American Indian governments will continue to press the Federal government for adequate funds for tribal courts and meaningful court reform. In 1992, American Indian governments will expect reaffirmation of our sovereign status. In 1992, American Indian tribes will continue to negotiate treaty-based rights to water and other natural resources. In 1992, Indian tribes will continue to seek change for the improved health and welfare of our people.

The resolution to designate 1992 as the Year of Reconciliation can be an excellent educational tool. It can be the basis for individual and community dialogue about the past and about the future. Nowhere in the resolution is the word "communication" mentioned, yet that is at the heart of any effort to reconcile. We suggest that the success of the resolution lies in the willingness of all Americans to listen, to explain, to agree to disagree, to compromise and come to terms, and to forgive.

This is an opportunity for all, Indians and non-Indians, to reflect on the past, to provide an accurate account of the past events, and most of all, to provide an opportunity to move into the next century with respect for all cultures.

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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 32

A joint resolution of the Senate and the House of Representatives of the State of Montana urging Montanans to affirm the cultural contributions of Native Americans on October 12, 1992, the observance of Columbus Day.

Whereas, in 1992, this nation will observe the 500th anniversary of the "discovery" of North America by Christopher Columbus despite historical records establishing that North America had been home to hundreds of Indian tribes prior to the arrival of Columbus; and

Whereas, the European nations and, later, the United States government acquired this land from the Indians by military conquest, sale, and negotiated cession; and

Whereas, our nation's treatment of the Indian tribes indigenous to Montana and this region severely reduced their lands, people, and sustenance; and

Whereas, the Montana Constitution provides for the protection of human dignity and freedom from discrimination for all Montanans; and

Whereas, the State of Montana had benefited from the contributions of Native Americans who have shared many valuable gifts from their way of life, thus contributing to

the development and successful settlement of the land they have long inhabited; and

Whereas, this way of life continues to offer insight into solutions for contemporary and urgent problems for a troubled planet and a fragmented people; and

Whereas, Native Americans had culture, religion, and value systems long before October 12, 1492, but had little opportunity to share these values with newcomers; and

Whereas, Montanans should take appropriate action whenever the culture, customs, and traditions of Native Americans are being abused; and

Whereas, a great danger is present if our state and country is swept into euphoria by the uncritical romanticizing of a cruel and bloody history that ignores the cultural and demographic devastation suffered by Native Americans after 1492; and

Whereas, an urgent need exists for a more inclusive and less biased historical account of the European dealings with Native Americans, including the rewriting of North American history to remove stereotypical images that demean Native Americans; and

Whereas, by continued silence and denial of past injustices, people often do not recognize the damage contributed to the present situation of many Native Americans; and

Whereas, the survival of Native Americans over 500 years of adversity demonstrates the resilience and adaptability of a people and has produced a diverse, pluralistic, and stronger American society.

Now, therefore, be it resolved by the Senate and the House of Representatives of the State of Montana:

(1) That as this nation observes the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Christopher Columbus in North America, the people of Montana recognize the cultural

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contributions of all peoples to our great state and create “a new beginning” by deepening our appreciation of Native Americans for their reverence for the sacredness of all creation, their belief in the oneness of the human family, and their recognition of the wisdom of elders, as well as their other gifts of culture, language, and tradition.

(2) That all Montanans observe “a new beginning” on October 12, 1992, in the workplace, home, and school by creating observances, events, and studies that build awareness of the contributions of Native Americans to Montana.

(3) That all Montanans resolve to approach the 1992 observance of Columbus Day by responding to our commitments to human dignity and the call for “a new beginning” that invites each of us to walk the circle of life together in our journey toward deeper human respect and affirmation of our diverse gifts of culture, language, and tradition.

(4) That all Montanans utilize communications networks to recognize the history and presence of Native American peoples within the state through teaching and narration by Native Americans whenever possible.

(5) That all Montanans affirm their commitment to honoring Indian treaties and respect the inherent sovereignty, dignity, and cultural uniqueness of this nation’s first Americans.

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 222

To designate 1992 as the “Year of Reconciliation Between American Indians and non-Indians”

Whereas 1992 will be recognized as the quincentennial anniversary of the arrival of Christopher Columbus to this continent;

Whereas this 500th anniversary offers an opportunity for the United States to honor the indigenous peoples of this continent;

Whereas strife between American Indian and non-Indian cultures is of grave concern to the people of the United States;

Whereas in the past improvement in cultural understanding has been achieved by individuals who have striven to understand the differences between cultures and to educate others;

Whereas a national effort to develop trust and respect between American Indians and non-Indians must include participation from the private and public sectors, churches and church associations, the Federal Government Tribal governments and State governments, individuals, communities, and community organizations;

Whereas mutual trust and respect provides a sound basis for constructive change, given a shared commitment to achieving the goals of equal opportunity, social justice and economic prosperity; and

Whereas the celebration of our cultural differences can lead to anew respect for American Indians and their culture among non-Indians: Now, therefore, be it

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Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That 1992 is designated as the “Year of Reconciliation Between American Indians and non-Indians.” The President is authorized and requested to issue a proclamation calling upon the people of the United States, both Indian and non-Indian, to lay aside fears and mistrust of one another, to build friendships, to join together and take part in shared cultural activities, and to strive towards mutual respect and understanding.