

Testimony of Charles F. Gauvin in Support of LD 2007

I am testifying in support of LD 2007. Conferring self-determination and undoing the other wrongs associated with the 1980 Maine Indian Land Claims Settlement legislation is the least we Maine people can do to begin to remedy the injustices our state has wrought on its Indigenous people.

As a sportsman, I will always feel like a trespasser on even the land I legally own as long as the Wabanaki people are not recognized as sovereigns of the lands that are theirs. I know that we cannot turn back the clock by dispossessing today's non-Indigenous landowners. We can, however, recreate the Wabanaki people's sovereign rights as landowners.

I find it deeply troubling that, here in Maine, the 1980 law has fostered a Wabanaki underclass, while many Indigenous people elsewhere have thrived. LD 2007 is not about hand-outs to correct this situation. Rather, it's about restorative justice. Give the Wabanaki people the same tools as other Indigenous people and let them take it from there.

As a small business owner, I am concerned about the damage to Maine's reputation that continues for so long as the state denies its Indigenous people a fair deal and the same rights and privileges enjoyed by Indigenous people elsewhere.

I cringe when I hear our leaders spurn this legislation because it might create some legal confusion and even engender litigation. What if Lyndon Johnson had refused to sign the 1968 Civil Rights Act for those reasons?

A little over 200 years ago, Maine inherited from Massachusetts an ugly legacy of injustice toward Indigenous people. Now, a little more than 200 years later, it's time to bury that legacy and turn the page.

I urge the Maine Legislature to demonstrate true moral leadership by passing LD 2007 with a veto-proof majority.