

IN FAVOR: LD 785

An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act

Chairpersons, Senator Anne Carney and Representative Amy Kuhn and Members of the Joint Judiciary Committee, my name is Suzanne Rudalevige and I live in Cape Elizabeth.

Once more we visit the subject of Tribal Rights in Maine. We are all aware by now that the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act and the Aroostook Band of Micmacs Settlement Act have over the last forty years prevented the Wabanaki tribes in Maine from controlling the land allotted to them. The Settlement treats tribal lands like municipalities over which the State has the control. It also disallows the Wabanaki tribes from taking advantage of the legislation passed by the Federal Government, which applies to the other 570 federally recognized tribes nationally. This has set the Wabanaki tribes back economically in measurable ways. The Harvard Study has shown that the income of tribes who benefit from this federal legislation has grown 61% while the Wabanaki tribes have been held back to a meager 9%.

The majority of Mainers are by now well aware that the European immigrants to this country made this their homeland by stealing the land from the tribes and making a determined genocidal assault on their existence -- often by devious means such as blankets infected with smallpox. In Maine we stole from the Wabanaki peoples. The people of Maine have already voted through their representatives to give control back to the Wabanaki tribes of the lands they now own but do not have full control over. May this be the year that we succeed!

My perspective comes from a religious and spiritual point of view following the Christian faith that I try to witness to. The Native Americans found their spirituality in the land: a different understanding from the western view of being stewards of the land *at best*, and at worst believing humans are the lords of the land which is solely for our disposal. Native Americans are bonded to the Earth and its creation in an intimate way. Making a cut between them and the land is barbaric. And one has only to realize that 85% of the remaining diversity on the planet is under Native control across the world, to realize they have a much better relationship with the earth than those of us from the western culture- and one which is to the advantage of us all.

Coming from a Christian perspective, besides honoring the spirituality of others, we are taught to undo oppression and make right what has been done unjustly. It is time to abandon the years of prejudice and revamp the Settlement in the detailed ways described in this bill. It is time to be fair to the tribes whose land we occupy.

Thank you.