

Congress may endorse Indian religious freedom

FROM THE YAKIMA NATION REVIEW

WASHINGTON—Senate Joint Resolution 102 concerning "American Indian Religious Freedom" was introduced in the U.S. Senate here Dec. 15 by Sen. James Abourezk, D-S.D. and nine other senators "to protect and preserve" traditional Indian religions and practice of those religions both inside and outside reservation borders.

Several noted tribal religious leaders, including Johnson Menick of the Yakima Nation, were present in the Senate for ceremonies of introduction of the new joint resolution. The resolution will be introduced in the House of Representatives Jan. 19 by Rep. Morris Udall, D-Ariz., chairman of the House Interior Committee.

The Abourezk resolution will establish as a national policy the religious rights of Indian people to access to all sacred sites within and outside their reservations in all 50 states, removes current restrictions on the "use of sacred objects" such as eagle feathers, and prohibits "interference with the performance of religious rites."

Co-sponsoring the Abourezk resolution on Indian religious freedoms were Sens. Hubert Humphrey, D-Minn., Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., Daniel Inouye, D-Hawaii, Spark Matsunaga, D-Hawaii, Mike Gravel, D-Alaska, Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, Mark Hatfield, R-Ore., Dewey Bartlett, D-Okla., and Barry Goldwater, R-Ariz.

Said Abourezk in introducing the resolution: "This resolution

will set a clear policy of religious freedom for traditional American Indians, Native Alaskans and Native Hawaiians.

"Indian traditional and religious leaders, some of whom have come a long way to be here today, urgently requested us to present this action. Absence of a clear policy has resulted in unfortunate and unintended infringement of their rights.

"We honor them, and urge you to support their time-honored right to full practice of their traditional religions."

The Carter White House was contacted by Abourezk last Nov. 16 on the matter of tribal religious freedoms, and a response under Carter's signature was received by Abourezk Nov. 24. Said Carter:

"Please be assured that this will be given thorough, sensitive and prompt attention." Carter said he had asked Interior Secretary Cecil Andrus, Attorney General Griffin Bell and Presidential Counselor Robert Lipschultz to work with Abourezk's office and the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs on the matter.

Abourezk had written Carter: "Given your stand for human rights around the world and the significance of your own religious experience, I have confidence that you will give this problem your careful consideration. It is an area that is readily supported by most Americans and is a concept that is certainly fundamental to the Bill of Rights."

Introduction of the Abourezk resolution came during Human Rights Week.