

Written by gallupsun
Monday, 09 October 2023 20:12

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The second Monday of October is observed as Indigenous Peoples' Day through a Presidential Proclamation signed by President Joe Biden Oct. 6.

The purpose of Indigenous Peoples' Day is to counter the erasure of the plight of Indigenous People that is embodied in the celebration of Columbus Day as a national holiday.

"Indigenous Peoples' Day recognizes and honors the contributions of Native Americans for our country since time immemorial," Navajo Nation Council Speaker Crystalyne Curley said. "We have a proud and honorable legacy in contributing to art, science, mathematics, architecture, government, and civil engineering. Tens of thousands of Navajo people have proudly served in the armed forces and fought in battle to protect the freedom of all Americans. Let us come together to remember and pray for our ancestors and future generations to come."

Indigenous Peoples' Day was first recognized in Berkeley, California in 1992 to coincide with the 500th anniversary of Columbus's arrival in the Americas in 1492. Over the years, many state legislatures have passed legislation to observe Indigenous Peoples' Day instead of Columbus Day, officially honoring the significance of Indigenous peoples.

Recently, U.S. Rep. Norma Torres, D-CA, and U.S. Sen. Martin Heinrich, D-N.M., introduced bills in the House and Senate to officially recognize Indigenous Peoples' Day on the second Monday in the month of October.

"The White House recognizes Indigenous Peoples' Day through proclamations, but it should also be recognized by Congress and made into law," Curley said. "We need congressional support for Senate Bill 2970 and House Resolution 5822 to officially recognize Indigenous Peoples' Day as a federal holiday."

On Oct. 6, Council Delegate Cherilyn Yazzie introduced Legislation No. 0236-23 for the Navajo Nation Council's Naabik'íyatí Committee to consider. The legislation urges congress to pass the congressional bills.

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"I certainly do not take credit for this legislation because this idea to replace Columbus Day started a long time ago," Yazzie said. "These Indigenous-led movements give us the opportunity to bring us back into balance with our sacred Mother Earth, to our water, to ourselves and each other. I thank our ancestors for praying for us. I do my best to make their prayers come true."

Indigenous communities across the Americas have weathered the storms of colonization, forced assimilation, disease, and genocide, yet have endured and continue to advocate for recognition, justice, and sovereignty. The replacement of Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples' Day is a crucial step in acknowledging these historical realities and fostering reconciliation.

Indigenous Peoples' Day provides states and municipalities the opportunity to engage in educational initiatives, cultural events, and celebrations that promote understanding, respect, and insight into the history and contributions of Indigenous People to the Americas.

"Join us today, as we honor Indigenous Americans' strength, wisdom, and resilience on this momentous occasion," Curley said. "Let us celebrate their histories and cultures, fostering a society that values diversity, inclusion, and justice."

