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California State Senate

JOHN L. BURTON
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October 7, 2002

To Whom It May Concern:

Senator Wes Chesbro and I authored SB 1828, legislation that sought to recognize and preserve Native American sacred sites, those places with physical features and special places on the land that hold deep spiritual significance for California Indians. In connection with that legislation, I asked the California Research Bureau to investigate whether the California Legislature had enacted laws that prevented California Indians from conducting traditional religious and spiritual practices.

California was settled by economic opportunists drawn west by the Gold Rush. Just as rivers were dammed and forests were cleared to make way for economic exploitation of the land, California Indians were removed in the name of progress.

Tribes were forcibly moved from Chico, from Warner Hot Springs and from northeastern California. Laws were passed to provide for the indentured servitude of California Indians to American settlers.

In 1851 and 1852, the federal government negotiated and signed treaties with California tribes that would have ceded 8.5 million acres of land to the Indians. But, unknown to the Indians, the treaties were not ratified by the U.S. Senate -- at the urging of the California Legislature -- and thus California Indians were left landless.

Throughout the 1850s, the California Legislature provided subsidies to bands of militia men for an Indian extermination program. Indians who survived were often chased into hiding far from their traditional territories and their sacred places.

The attached CRB report is a reminder that we must not forget this history of economic motivations that led to tribal and cultural eradication. We must consider today whether economic exploitation of the land still should trump spiritual and traditional customs.

Peace and friendship,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John L. Burton".

John L. Burton
President pro Tempore