

107TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. CON. RES. 16

Expressing the sense of Congress that the George Washington letter to Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, which is on display at the B'nai B'rith Klutznick National Jewish Museum in Washington, D.C., is one of the most significant early statements buttressing the nascent American constitutional guarantee of religious freedom.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

FEBRUARY 15, 2001

Mr. CHAFEE (for himself and Mr. REED) submitted the following concurrent resolution; which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary

JULY 19, 2001

Reported by Mr. LEAHY, without amendment

JULY 23, 2001

Considered and agreed to

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

Expressing the sense of Congress that the George Washington letter to Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, which is on display at the B'nai B'rith Klutznick National Jewish Museum in Washington, D.C., is one of the most significant early statements buttressing the nascent American constitutional guarantee of religious freedom.

Whereas George Washington responded to a letter sent by Moses Seixas, warden of Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, in August 1790;

Whereas, although Touro Synagogue, the oldest Jewish house of worship in the United States, and now a national historic site, was dedicated in December 1763, Jewish families had been in Newport for over 100 years before that date;

Whereas these Jews, some of whom were Marranos, came to the United States with hopes of starting a new life in this country, where they could practice their religious beliefs freely and without persecution;

Whereas they were drawn to the Colony of Rhode Island and the Providence Plantations because of Governor Roger Williams' assurances of religious liberty;

Whereas the letter from Touro Synagogue is the most famous of many congratulatory notes addressed to the new president by American Jewish congregations;

Whereas Seixas articulated the following principle, which Washington repeated in his letter: "For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance; requires only that they who live under its protection, should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support";

Whereas this was the first statement of such a principle enunciated by a leader of the new United States Government;

Whereas this principle has become the cornerstone of United States religious and ethnic toleration as it has developed during the past two centuries;

Whereas the original letter is on display as part of the permanent collection of the B'nai B'rith Klutznick National Jewish Museum in Washington, D.C.; and

Whereas Americans of all religious faiths gather at Touro Synagogue each August on the anniversary of the date of the letter's delivery and at the Klutznick Museum on George Washington's birthday to hear readings of the letter and to discuss how the letter's message can be applied to contemporary challenges: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved by the Senate (the House of Representatives*
 2 *concurring), That it is the sense of Congress that—*

3 (1) the George Washington letter to Touro Syn-
 4 agogue in Newport, Rhode Island, in August 1790,
 5 which is on display as part of the permanent collec-
 6 tion of the B'nai B'rith Klutznick National Jewish
 7 Museum in Washington, D.C., is one of the most
 8 significant early statements buttressing the nascent
 9 American constitutional guarantee of religious free-
 10 dom; and

11 (2) the text of the George Washington letter
 12 should be widely circulated, serving as an important
 13 tool for teaching tolerance to children and adults
 14 alike.

○