

House Calendar No. 54

107TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. CON. RES. 62

[Report No. 107-143]

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 HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MARCH 14, 2001

Mr. KENNEDY of Rhode Island (for himself and Mr. LANGEVIN) submitted the following concurrent resolution; which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary

JULY 17, 2001

Reported with an amendment, referred to the House Calendar, and ordered to be printed

[Insert the part printed in *italic*]

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 the text of George Washington's letter to Touro Synagogue states:

"Gentlemen:

"While I receive with much satisfaction, your Address replete with expressions of affection and esteem, I rejoice in the opportunity of answering you, that I shall always

retain a grateful remembrance of the cordial welcome I experienced in my visit to Newport, from all classes of Citizens.

“The reflection on the days of difficulty and danger which are past, is rendered the more sweet, from a consciousness that they are succeeded by days of uncommon prosperity and security. If we have wisdom to make the best use of the advantages with which we are now favored, we cannot fail, under the just administration of a good Government, to become a great and a happy people.

“The Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. 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.

“It would be inconsistent with the frankness of my character not to avow that I am pleased with your favorable opinion of my administration, and fervent wishes for my felicity. May the Children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants, while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid. May the father of all mercies scatter light and not darkness in our paths, and make us

all in our several vocations useful here, and in his own due time and way everlastingly happy.”;

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

3 (1) the George Washington letter sent to Touro
4 Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, in August
5 1790, which is on display as part of the permanent
6 collection of the B’nai B’rith Klutznick National
7 Jewish Museum in Washington, D.C., is one of the
8 most significant early statements buttressing the
9 nascent American constitutional guarantee of reli-
10 gious freedom; and

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

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