

Senate Joint Resolution No. 5

CHAPTER 31

Relative to the Armenian Genocide.

[Filed with Secretary of State April 30, 2001.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SJR 5, Poochigian. Armenian Genocide: Day of Remembrance.

This measure would designate April 24, 2001, as “California Day of Remembrance for the Armenian Genocide of 1915–1923.” It would memorialize the Congress of the United States to likewise act to commemorate the Armenian Genocide.

DIGEST KEY

BILL TEXT

WHEREAS, Armenians living in their historic homeland in Asia Minor were subjected to severe persecution and brutal injustice by the Turkish rulers of the Ottoman Empire before and after the turn of the twentieth century, including widespread acts of destruction, mayhem, and murder during the period from 1894 to 1896, and again in 1909; and

WHEREAS, The horrible experience of the Armenians at the hands of their Turkish oppressors culminated with what is known by historians as the “First Genocide of the Twentieth Century,” or the “Forgotten Genocide”; and

WHEREAS, The Armenian Genocide began with the murder of hundreds of Armenian intellectuals, and political, religious, and business leaders who were arrested and taken from their homes in Constantinople before dawn on April 24, 1915; and

WHEREAS, The Young Turk regime then in control of the empire planned and executed the unspeakable atrocities committed against the Armenians from 1915 through 1923, including the torture, starvation, and murder of 1.5 million Armenians, death marches into the Syrian desert, and the exile of more than 500,000 innocent people; and

WHEREAS, While there were some Turks who jeopardized their safety in order to protect Armenians from the slaughter being perpetrated by the Young Turk regime, the massacres of the Armenians constituted one of the most atrocious violations of human rights in the history of the world; and

WHEREAS, The United States Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Henry Morgenthau, Sr., stated “Whatever crimes the most perverted instincts of the human mind can devise, and whatever refinements of persecutions and injustice the most debased imagination can conceive, became the daily misfortunes of this devoted people. I am confident that the whole history of the human race contains no such horrible episode as this. The great massacres and persecutions of the past seem almost insignificant when compared to the sufferings of the Armenian race in 1915. The killing of the Armenian people was accompanied by the systematic destruction of churches, schools, libraries, treasures of art, and cultural monuments in an attempt to eliminate all traces of a noble civilization with a history of more than 3,000 years”; and

WHEREAS, Contemporary newspapers like the New York Times carried headlines including, “Tales of Armenian Horrors Confirmed,” “Million Armenians Killed or in Exile,” and “Wholesale Massacre of Armenians by Turks”; and

WHEREAS, Adolph Hitler, in persuading his army commanders that the merciless persecution and killing of Jews, Poles, and other groups of people would bring no retribution, declared, “Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians”; and

WHEREAS, Unlike other groups and governments that have admitted the abuses and crimes of predecessor regimes, and despite the overwhelming weight of the evidence, the Republic of Turkey has denied the occurrence of the crimes against humanity committed by the Young Turk rulers, and those denials compound the grief of the few remaining survivors of the atrocities and desecrate the memory of the victims; and

WHEREAS, Nations of the world have suffered reprisals and condemnations by Turkey because of efforts to commemorate the Armenian Genocide; and

WHEREAS, There have been concerted efforts to revise history through the dissemination of propaganda suggesting that Armenians were responsible for their fate in the period from 1915 through 1923 and by the funding of programs at American educational institutions for the purpose of furthering the cause of this revisionism and to counter, in the words of a Turkish official, “the Armenian view”; and

WHEREAS, Leaders of nations with strategic, commercial, and cultural ties to the Republic of Turkey should be reminded of their duty to encourage Turkish officials to cease efforts to distort facts and deny the history of events surrounding the Armenian Genocide; and

WHEREAS, The accelerated level and scope of denial and revisionism, coupled with the passage of time and the fact that very few survivors remain who serve as reminders of indescribable brutality and tormented lives, compel a sense of urgency in efforts to solidify recognition of historical truth; and

WHEREAS, By consistently remembering and forcefully condemning the atrocities committed against the Armenians and honoring the survivors, as well as other victims of similar heinous conduct, we guard against repetition of those acts of genocide; and

WHEREAS, California is home to the largest population of Armenians in the United States, and those citizens have enriched our state through their leadership in the fields of business, agriculture, academia, medicine, government, and the arts and are proud and patriotic practitioners of American citizenship; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate and Assembly of the State of California, jointly, That the Legislature of the State of California hereby designates April 24, 2001, as “California Day of Remembrance for the Armenian Genocide of 1915–1923;” and be it further

Resolved, That the State of California respectfully memorializes the Congress of the United States to likewise act to commemorate the Armenian Genocide; and be it further

Resolved, That the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies of this resolution to the President of the United States, Members of the United States Congress, the Governor, and Armenian churches and commemorative organizations in California.