

Senate Joint Resolution No. 1

CHAPTER 18

Relative to the Armenian Genocide.

[Filed with Secretary of State April 14, 2003.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SJR 1, Poochigian. Armenian Genocide: Day of Remembrance.

This measure would designate April 24, 2003, as the “California Day of Remembrance for the Armenian Genocide of 1915–1923.” It would memorialize the Congress of the United States to act likewise to commemorate the Armenian Genocide.

DIGEST KEY

BILL TEXT

WHEREAS, The Armenian people, living in their 3,000 year historic homeland in eastern Asia Minor and throughout the Ottoman Empire, were subjected to severe persecution and brutal injustice by the rulers of the Ottoman Empire before and after the turn of the twentieth century, including widespread massacres, usurpation of land and property, and acts of wanton destruction during the period from 1894 to 1896, and again in 1909; and

WHEREAS, The horrible experience of the Armenians at the hands of their oppressors culminated in 1915 in what is known by historians as the “First Genocide of the Twentieth Century,” and as the prototype of modern-day mass killing; and

WHEREAS, The Armenian Genocide began with the arrest, exile, and murder of hundreds of Armenian intellectuals, and political, religious, and business leaders, starting on April 24, 1915; and

WHEREAS, The regime then in control of the empire, known as the “Young Turks,” planned and executed the unspeakable atrocities committed against the Armenian people from 1915 through 1923, which included the torture, starvation, and murder of 1,500,000 Armenians, death marches into the Syrian desert, the forced exile of more than 500,000 innocent people, and the loss of the traditional Armenian homelands; and

WHEREAS, While there were some Turks and others who jeopardized their safety in order to protect Armenians from the crimes being perpetrated by the Young Turk regime, the genocide of the Armenian people constituted one of the most egregious 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, Winston Churchill wrote: “As for Turkish atrocities: ... massacring uncounted thousands of helpless Armenians, men, women, and children together, whole districts blotted out in one administrative holocaust—these were beyond human redress”; and

WHEREAS, Contemporary newspapers like the New York Times commonly carried headlines such as “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 on the eve of World War II that the merciless persecution and killing of Poles, Jews, and other peoples would bring no retribution, declared, “Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians”; and

WHEREAS, Unlike other peoples and governments that have admitted and denounced the abuses and crimes of predecessor regimes, and despite the overwhelming weight of evidence, the Republic of Turkey has inexplicably and adamantly 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, desecrate the memory of the victims, and cause continuing trauma and pain to the descendants of the victims; and

WHEREAS, Nations that have officially recognized the Armenian Genocide have been subjected to retaliation and condemnation by Turkey; 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

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 desist from 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 few survivors remain who serve as reminders of indescribable brutality and torment, compel a sense of urgency in efforts to solidify recognition and reaffirmation of historical truth; and

WHEREAS, By honoring the survivors and consistently remembering and forcefully condemning the atrocities committed against the Armenian people as well as the persecution of the Assyrian and Greek populations of the Ottoman Empire, we guard against repetition of the crime of genocide; and

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

WHEREAS, The State of California has been at the forefront in encouraging and promoting a curriculum relating to human rights and genocide in order to empower future generations to prevent recurrence of the crime of genocide; 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, 2003, as the “California Day of Remembrance for the Armenian Genocide of 1915–1923”; and be it further

Resolved, That the State of California commends its conscientious educators who teach about human rights and genocide; and be it further

Resolved, That the State of California respectfully memorializes the Congress of the United States to act likewise 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, and the Governor.