

**Congresswoman Betty McCollum
United States Postal Service
Minnesota Statehood Commemorative Stamp Ceremony
May 17, 2008**

Good afternoon.

I want to thank the United States Postal Service for honoring Minnesota and for celebrating the 150th year of our state with this beautiful commemorative stamp.

As Minnesotans we have much to be thankful for during these 150 years of statehood. We live in a blessed land with an abundance of natural resources that allowed for settlement and the development of our state.

The Minnesota we live in today is the result the hard work and sacrifices of the generations before us – pioneers, immigrants, traders, farmers, loggers, miners and factory workers. Their toil, courage and vision have become our inheritance and because of their contributions the Minnesota of 2008 continues to be a place of opportunity, new beginnings, and endless possibilities.

There is another inheritance we must recognize as we reflect on the history of our state.

For all the pride we feel as Minnesotans, we must also use this moment to acknowledge the full historic reality. Minnesota's history is reflected in our state flag. "The Star of the North" is in French. But another part of history is reflected there as well – the Native American and the settlers who followed after the Louisiana Purchase.

Hundreds of years before statehood in 1858 people were living on this land we now call Minnesota.

The First People of Minnesota, the First People of the United States, were not European colonists and settlers. The First People of this state were the Anishinaabe – the Ojibwe and Chippewa – and the Dakota Sioux.

The forests and prairies and waters sustained their families and they treated the land with a sacred respect. For the First People of Minnesota, this land could never be owned or conveyed, it was where the Creator had placed them and it was a sacred place. There was a balance between the men and women and the natural world that existed for centuries.

Then it changed. The European conquests of North America not only disrupted the balance of life for Native Americans, but began over two centuries of violence, oppression, injustice, and pain.

This legacy tragically continues to live within the communities of First Minnesotans who reside across our state: Mille Lacs, Shakopee Mdewakanton, White Earth, Bois Forte, Prairie Island, Grand Portage, Red Lake, Leech Lake, Fond du Lac, Upper Sioux, and Lower Sioux – as well as our urban Native communities like Little Earth.

These communities, like all Minnesota communities, are all looking forward to brighter future for their children, but they also have profound connections to their ancestors, their history and their traditions.

Last year, a Republican colleague and classmate of mine from Virginia, introduced a Congressional Resolution – H.J. Res. 3 – that is unlikely to pass Congress, but it should because it would have Congress say what needs to be said.

The resolution “commends and honors the Native Peoples [of the United States] for the thousands of years that they have stewarded and protected this land.” The resolution also “apologizes on behalf of the people of the United States to all Native Peoples for the many instances of violence, maltreatment, and neglect inflicted on Native Peoples by citizens of the United States.”

I am proud to be a congressional co-sponsor of this resolution and from the deepest core of my being I believe these words.

Today as we celebrate the history of our state, we must acknowledge our full history – and some of it is painful. This is true in a family. It is also true for this state and this nation. As Minnesotans, let us commit ourselves to healing the pain of the past and building a more hopeful future.

Today we celebrate as one Minnesota – and let us move forward together. Let us invest our energy, strength and resources to caring for all of our children, families, and communities, because the greatest asset our state possess is the people of Minnesota.

Thanks you and God bless Minnesota.