

The case for Tenn. tribal recognition

Bills are presently under consideration in Nashville that would establish standards for state recognition of Native American Indian tribes in Tennessee. Among the three tribes named in the proposed legislation is the Remnant Yuchi Nation of Kingsport. In previous years, the Bristol Herald Courier has editorialized against Tennessee tribal recognition. However, there is a good case for it.

The first reason and the one of greatest interest to me personally, is simply to honor and acknowledge the history of the people who were here before Europeans arrived in the Americas. The late pre-historic American Indian societies of eastern Tennessee reached a high state of development. It comes as a surprise to most people to learn that Spanish conquistadors met these Indian societies in present day

northeast Tennessee and southwest Virginia in 1541 and 1567 (decades before the settlement of Jamestown).

Arguably, Tennessee does less in its public policy to recognize its superb American Indian legacy than any other US state with a comparable, or even inferior, American Indian heritage. Tribal recognition is a practical way to recognize that heritage and will bring benefits to the state.

One effect of the legislation will not be to bring casinos to Tennessee. A 2006 ruling by the Tennessee Attorney General holds that the Tennessee constitution prohibits games of chance associated with casinos. However, the development of tribal heritage sites will bring tourists to the state. Two major corporations have discussed investing \$300 million in east and west Tennessee for tribal



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related tourism, but only after state recognition is achieved.

It is ironic that Tennessee American Indian artisans, such as potters, silversmiths, beadwork artists, etc., cannot legally sell

their handiwork. Under the provisions of the 1990 Indian Arts and Crafts Act (administered by the Federal Trade Commission), artisans are required to be certified. State recognition provides a mechanism for such certification. Also ironically, Tennessee Indian pow wows seem to be largely organized and run by out-of-staters.

State recognition has potential economic benefits by making American Indian Tennesseans eligible to apply for Federal funds for education, housing, highways, and public health, and making Indian contractors eligible for state and federal minority

business contracts. Such funding would help all Tennesseans.

There is an ongoing movement among eastern states for tribal recognition. Virginia acknowledged its 9th (Cheroenhaka), 10th (Nottoway), and 11th (Patawomeck) state recognized tribes in 2010, and just last month the Governor of Maryland recognized that state's 1st (Piscataway Nation) and 2nd (Piscataway Conoy) Indian tribes. North Carolina grants its state recognition to eight tribes and to the federally recognized Eastern Band of Cherokee. Kentucky recognizes one tribe, Georgia three, Alabama eight, and Louisiana seven.

My opinion is that tribal recognition in Tennessee is long overdue.

Jim Glanville is a former Virginia Tech professor and researcher studying American Indians, including a group that lived in the Mountain Empire, which he dubbed "Holstonia."