

Harper's apology to natives puts pressure on Bush

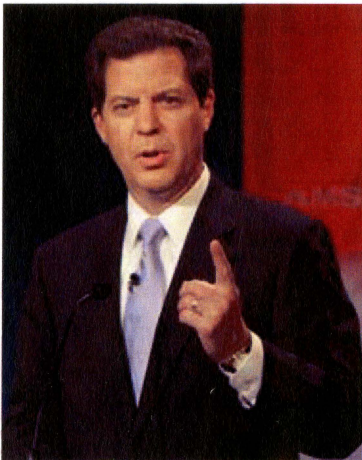
BILL CURRY
FROM WEDNESDAY'S GLOBE AND MAIL
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OTTAWA — Canada's residential-schools apology has opened the possibility that U.S. President George W. Bush may do the same in his final months of office, says Republican Senator Sam Brownback.

In an interview with *The Globe and Mail*, the senior senator from Kansas said Canada's apology has increased the pressure on Washington, and he expressed hope that Prime Minister Stephen Harper will raise the issue directly with the President.

Mr. Brownback has already secured the support of his Senate colleagues for a historic, broadly worded apology to native Americans. The three-page apology was added as an amendment in February to legislation dealing with Indian health care. It now must be approved by the U.S. House of Representatives and then ultimately the President.

Mr. Brownback has written Mr. Bush urging him to support the apology, and said Mr. Harper's statement last month aids his campaign in Washington.



Sen. Sam Brownback of Kansas takes part in a debate last October. (*Associated Press*)

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“It does help. And coming from a Conservative government I think helps, too,” he said. “This is something that I think that people of faith orientation should be very strongly supportive of. ... I'd love to hear that [Mr. Harper] would contact [Mr. Bush] or that it would come up in one of their meetings. That would be fantastic.”

In a U.S. election year, time is running out for Mr. Brownback to get the apology through the House and onto the President's agenda, but he's optimistic.

“If the House will move it, it will happen. I think we've got a decent chance,” he said.

A U.S. apology would be a remarkable development for a country whose history with native Americans has been far more violent than what occurred north of the border. The image of heroic cowboys battling Indian enemies has long been ingrained in American mythology, a staple of pulp fiction and films. But the apology adopted by the U.S. Senate would turn some of that on its head.

It acknowledges that “many Native Peoples suffered and perished” due to official federal government policies that removed natives from the land, as well as “during bloody armed confrontations and massacres, such as the Sand Creek Massacre in 1864 and the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890.”

The latter saw roughly 300 natives killed, including Sitting Bull, a Lakota chief who helped lead the resistance against the U.S. government. The battle is perhaps best known as the concluding chapter of the 1971 book *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, by historian and author Dee Brown. The book was turned into a film last year by HBO.

Canada's Indian residential schools were in fact modelled after what was already taking place in the United States, and the Senate's apology recognizes the impact of the American boarding schools as well.

“The Federal Government condemned the traditions, beliefs and customs of Native Peoples and endeavored to assimilate them by such policies as the redistribution of land ... and the forcible removal of children from their families to faraway boarding schools where their Native practices and languages were degraded and forbidden,” it states.

Should the United States adopt the apology, it would cap a historic year of reconciliation around the world. Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd issued an apology to his country's indigenous peoples in February. The new Australian PM has since been criticized, however, for refusing to commit to a compensation package along the lines of Canada's multibillion-dollar settlement approved by the Harper government in 2006.

The Senate's move would be open to the same criticism, as it concludes with a clear statement that the apology does not support any claim against the United States nor serve as a settlement.

Nonetheless, American native leader Tex Hall said he can live with that disclaimer if it produces an apology from the President.

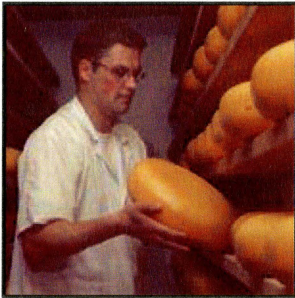
“To me, it's a huge first step for the U.S. to finally say that,” said the former president of the National Congress of American Indians, who said he received a call from Mr. Brownback out of

the blue several years ago to discuss a possible apology. "It's a breakthrough in Canada that helps the initiative down here."

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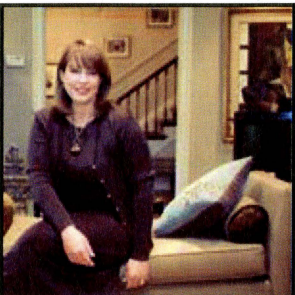
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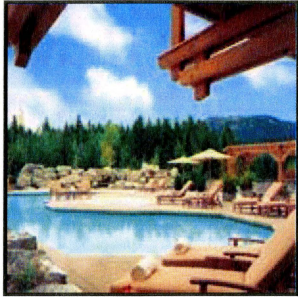
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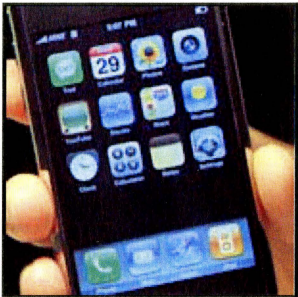
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