

My name is Denise Juneau. I am an attorney by trade, but my passion and background is in public education – with an emphasis on Indian education. I am a proud Montana citizen and a product of Montana’s public education system. I attended a public grade school, public junior high and public high school the Montana education system. I continued my education and received a bachelor degree from a Montana public University. After receiving a Master degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, I returned to Montana and taught at a public high school for several years. After gaining experience in the trenches, I took a job as the Indian Education Specialist at the Office of Public Instruction, where I worked on Indian Education issues for all of Montana’s public schools. My most recent adventure led me to attend and graduate from a public Montana law school ---- I went through the entire gamut of Montana’s public school system with very minimal education about Indians, other than those classes I sought out.

As a teacher, I taught many concepts and topics that were foreign to me and were not a part of my own personal background – English literature and Greek mythology for example (I am not English and I am not Greek) – these were topics that I had to learn about in order to teach about them. None of these subjects were constitutionally promised to students, but I was expected, through state and local standards, to teach them. I consider Indian education to be an even higher expectation than those other subjects because it is constitutionally promised to its citizens. Montana, however, has yet to rise to meet this expectation.

Last week I presented to Capital High students – about 50 of them. There was a “special day” full of presenters to discuss “Indian issues.” My topic was tribal sovereignty – [an issue that, according to OPI data, 98% of teachers do not have knowledge of] -- and I

had an entire 48 minutes to get the concept across to them (you think your time is short to get your job done . . . )

- Guess how many of that group of 50 knew that there were 7 Indian reservation in Montana? - 3- and that included 1 of the teachers.
- None realized that treaties between tribes and the U.S. Government are still valid - the Supreme Law of the Land according to the U.S. Constitution.
- All of them thought that reservation land was given to tribes, rather than understanding that tribes exchanged their land with the US for certain rights and services, and through that process, reserved a homeland for themselves.
- None knew that tribes have their own constitutions and governments.
- None knew that Indians became U.S. citizens in 1924.
- None of them had an inkling that there was a tribal government – to – federal government relationship that was based on the U.S. Constitution and treaties.
- Those high school students [17 and 18 year old Montana citizens] asked questions like: “can Indians could vote in state elections” and “can white people can live on reservations.”

It is disgraceful that high school students lack fundamental knowledge about the First People of this Great State – 7% of their State’s population. After looking to the Montana Constitution, laws enacted by this body, state supreme court case law, and state accreditation standards - it is grossly unfortunate that Montana’s students consistently leave school without a basic understanding of tribes and Indians.

As much as we would like to think that Montana is doing a good enough job at

meeting its Constitutional obligation, or that Montana has enough curriculum resources, or that Montana teachers can carry out Indian education in their classrooms - we have 30 plus years of neglect and omission we can point to that it has not happened. And I have last week's experience at Capital High to prove that it has yet to happen.

You now have a "defining moment" in front of you concerning the definition of Indian Education. A provision about Indian Education was placed into the list of promises that Montana made to its citizens in 1972 – over 30 years ago. This promise has yet to be fulfilled. You currently have before you, however, an opportunity to make good on this promise. There has been a lot of talk lately about "handshakes being worth something," the "opening of doors," and "new days." Given the past and most recent Supreme Court case - it is time to fulfill that promise the constitution convention delegates made to all Montanans.

The promise is not overwhelming – and its goals are noble and honorable. The provision simply promises that ALL Montana citizens will be provided the opportunity to learn about Indian people and tribes in Montana. This does not mean that only Indians learn about Indians - this means that ALL Montanans learn about Indians - including Montanans like those Capital High students.

So, what needs to happen? The very basic needs include resources to be provided to teachers and students – and that professional development opportunities be provided to Montana educators so they are qualified and capable of teaching accurate information. When I was the Indian education specialist at OPI, I talked with a lot of teachers across the state – and after 3 years and thousands of miles – I did not meet one teacher who did not want to include Indian issues in their curriculum. Guess what they needed? Knowledge and

materials. This is exactly what Rep. Bixby's bill provides and what the Constitution requires, and it is what Montanans deserve. There is nothing in HB692 that is new, novel or unreasonable. Only good things can come from this proposed definition. In fact, to truly receive a quality education in Montana - everything in this definition is necessary. The Legislature would be remiss to not adopt, at a minimum, the provisions contained in this bill, including the Indian Education provisions.

Generations of educators have worked to implement Indian Education for All Montanans. They have attempted, over and over, to convey the gravity of this issue to those in power. Decades have passed. There has been an enormous multitude of reports, studies, plans, meetings, summits, and conferences about the subject. It is time - after 30 plus years - to include Indian education as part of a quality education for ALL Montanans.

I want to leave you with the words of the District Court in the *Columbia Falls School District v. State* litigation - after hearing tons of testimony and wading through tons of evidence - the District Court noted that: "In reality, the State appears to be *defenseless* on Plaintiff's claim that Article X, Section 1 (2) of the Montana Constitution has not been implemented by the State despite the constitution's direction to do so." Now really listen to those words - The State appears to be defenseless on the claim that Indian education has not been implemented - despite the constitution's direction to do so.

Fulfilling this promise made by your predecessors will take heroic hearts. I urge you to engage in acts of heroism and begin the process of fulfilling this neglected Constitutional promise. I thank you for your courage in this "defining moment."