

Argus Leader

Biden signs Sen. Mike Rounds' RESPECT ACT to repeal discriminatory laws targeting Native Americans

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For Sen. Mike Rounds, R-SD, the passage of the [RESPECT Act](#) has been seven years in the making.

Officially titled Repealing Existing Substandard Provisions Encouraging Conciliation with Tribes Act, the law eliminates 11 outdated federal laws that directly discriminated against Native Americans. Laws that stripped Native children from their families to be placed in Indian boarding schools such as the Carlisle Industrial School and laws that eliminated treaties during times of war between tribes and the U.S. government are now a thing of the past.

President Joe Biden signed the bipartisan legislation into law Tuesday.

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Rounds told the Argus Leader in an interview Wednesday the work started in 2015 when his staff, a number of whom were tribal citizens, started researching discriminatory laws directly impacting Native Americans. They selected a number of laws they felt needed to be struck from the books, he said.

"These were the most egregious laws that we agreed should be repealed and that, in our opinion, never should have been put on the books in the first place," Rounds said.

And while these laws have not been enforced in decades, Rounds said he found there needed to be a modicum of respect.



"That we did not show enough respect for the Native American peoples in this land to ever repeal these, that seemed to me to say something about the fact that it was on the backburner and nobody really cared," Rounds said.

The two-term senator said the first iteration of the RESPECT Act in 2016 faced challenges getting out of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee, because it wasn't considered an emergency bill, meaning a bill has a faster route through Congress.

The RESPECT Act, which had support from a variety of lawmakers including Sen. Kevin Cramer, R-ND, and Sen. Ben Ray Lujan, D-NM, was introduced in March 2021 and made it through the Senate committee and floor, where it passed unanimously into the House of Representatives.

"It's just a matter of each process takes a little bit of time and it's not always something that is going to catch the attention of enough people to actually make it work. But this one, finally, we were able to get completed," Rounds said.