Today, the House of Representatives unanimously passed legislation introduced by Congressman Joe Baca (D-Rialto) that encourages the designation of the Friday after Thanksgiving as Native American Heritage Day. The Native American Heritage Day Act of 2009, H.J. Res. 40, encourages the establishment of a day to pay tribute to Native Americans for their many contributions to the United States, and passed by a unanimous 385 – 0 vote.

"Native Americans have consistently enriched American culture throughout their proud history," said Rep. Baca. "It is important that we recognize these significant contributions, and ensure everyone is properly educated on the heritage and achievements of Native Americans."

The Native American Heritage Day Act of 2009 encourages the people of the United States, as well as Federal, State, and local governments, and interested groups and organizations to observe the Friday after Thanksgiving as Native American Heritage Day. Ceremonies and activities on that day will focus on the history, cultural legacy, language, and traditions of Native Americans. The bill also encourages public elementary and secondary schools to enhance student understanding of Native Americans by providing classroom instruction focusing on their history, achievements, and contributions.

"This bill will help to preserve the history and legacy of Native Americans," added Rep. Baca. "Native Americans and their ancestors have played a critical role in the formation of our nation. They have fought with valor and died in every American war dating back to the Revolutionary War. They have also made countless cultural contributions in the areas of art, science, sports, and much more. We must encourage greater awareness of the significant role they have played in America's history."

Last Congress, Rep. Baca sponsored legislation that passed the House and Senate and was signed into law by President Bush, creating Native American Heritage Day 2008. Due to the unique parliamentary rules of Congress, legislation creating days of recognition must be reintroduced every session (two years). As a state Assemblyman, Rep. Baca introduced the legislation that established the fourth Friday of September as Native American Day in California – which became state law in 1998.

"Since my time in the California State Legislature, I have fought to ensure Native Americans receive the recognition they deserve," continued Rep. Baca. "After introducing the legislation that established Native American Day in California, and introduced legislation that created a national day of recognition in 2008, I am proud to introduce this bill calling for Native American Heritage Day 2009. I thank my good friend James Ramos, now Chairman of the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians, for standing with me from the beginning on this long journey to ensure the contributions of Native Americans are recognized and appreciated by all."

The Native American Heritage Day Act of 2009 is currently supported by 184 federally recognized Indian tribes throughout the nation. Congressman Baca has been an active member of the Native American Caucus in the House of Representatives since first coming to Congress in 1999.