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HOUSE MEMORIAL 27

**54TH LEGISLATURE - STATE OF NEW MEXICO - SECOND SESSION, 2020**

INTRODUCED BY

Anthony Allison and D. Wonda Johnson and Derrick J. Lente  
and Melanie Ann Stansbury and Brian Egolf

A MEMORIAL

HONORING WES STUDI AND HIS MANY ACHIEVEMENTS.

WHEREAS, Wes Studi embodies the definition of a  
Renaissance man; and

WHEREAS, among his many roles, Wes is an actor, musician,  
activist, author, advocate of Native American languages, mentor  
and stone carver; and

WHEREAS, Wes, who is of Cherokee descent, made Oscar  
history in October 2019, when he became the first Native  
American actor to receive an Oscar; and

WHEREAS, the academy of motion picture arts and sciences  
presented the honorary award to Wes for "portraying strong  
Native American characters with poignancy and authenticity";  
and

WHEREAS, Wes's remarkable life has been a fascinating

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1 journey from his Cherokee boyhood to the rarified ranks of  
2 Hollywood's most respected actors; and

3 WHEREAS, the eldest son of a ranch hand, Wes was born in  
4 1947 in Nofire Hollow, Oklahoma; and

5 WHEREAS, Wes spoke only his native Cherokee until he was  
6 five, when he was enrolled in the Murrell home to attend public  
7 school; and

8 WHEREAS, Wes later attended and graduated from the  
9 Chilocco Indian boarding school in northern Oklahoma; and

10 WHEREAS, after school, Wes joined the United States army  
11 and was stationed at Fort Benning, Georgia; and

12 WHEREAS, stories of returning Vietnam War veterans moved  
13 Wes deeply, and with only twelve months of his six-year tour of  
14 duty left, Wes volunteered to go to Vietnam, where he served  
15 one tour in south Vietnam with the ninth infantry division in  
16 the Mekong delta; and

17 WHEREAS, after an honorable military discharge, Wes  
18 returned home and became seriously involved in challenging  
19 injustices against Native Americans; and

20 WHEREAS, Wes joined the American Indian movement and  
21 participated in the trail of broken treaties protest march in  
22 1972 and joined hundreds of Native American activists on the  
23 march to Washington, D.C.; and

24 WHEREAS, Wes also was one of the protesters who briefly  
25 occupied the bureau of Indian affairs building in Washington,

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1 D.C., and participated and was arrested with others while  
2 occupying Wounded Knee, South Dakota; and

3 WHEREAS, Wes recognized he could channel his feelings into  
4 making positive changes and he changed course; and

5 WHEREAS, Wes moved to Tahlequah, Oklahoma, where he worked  
6 for the Cherokee Nation, helping to start the *Cherokee Phoenix*,  
7 a bilingual newspaper still in publication; and

8 WHEREAS, Wes also began teaching the Cherokee language in  
9 the community and later attended Northeastern state university  
10 in Tahlequah, where he made further attempts to positively  
11 influence other Native Americans; and

12 WHEREAS, after college, Wes ran his own horse ranch and  
13 became a professional horse trainer; and

14 WHEREAS, in 1983, Wes began acting at the American Indian  
15 theater company in Tulsa, where he found both the adrenaline  
16 rush he craved and the cathartic release he needed; and

17 WHEREAS, Wes credits his passion and multifaceted  
18 background for his powerful character portrayals that  
19 confronted and changed a Hollywood stereotype; and

20 WHEREAS, Wes broke new ground and brought fully developed  
21 Native American characters to the screen, highlighting the  
22 success of Native Americans in non-traditional roles; and

23 WHEREAS, Wes's professional stage debut was in 1984 with  
24 *Black Elk Speaks*; not long after, Wes moved to Los Angeles,  
25 landing his first film role in *Powwow Highway* and his first

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1 television debut in *Longarm*; and

2 WHEREAS, in 1990, Wes portrayed a Pawnee warrior in *Dances*  
3 *with Wolves* and two years later landed the role of Magua in *The*  
4 *Last of the Mohicans*, the performance that put him on the map;  
5 and

6 WHEREAS, Wes went on to play the title character in the  
7 film *Geronimo: An American Legend*, for which he won a western  
8 heritage award; and

9 WHEREAS, in 2002, Wes brought the legendary character  
10 Lieutenant Joe Leaphorn to life based on Tony Hillerman's books  
11 *Skinwalkers*, *Coyote Waits* and *A Thief in Time*; and

12 WHEREAS, Wes is universally recognized and admired for  
13 other unforgettable performances in *Heat*, *Deep Rising*, *Mystery*  
14 *Men*, *The Only Good Indian* and *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* and  
15 for roles in *Avatar*, *Being Flynn* and *Hostiles*; and

16 WHEREAS, his television credits include *Penny Dreadful*,  
17 *The Red Road*, *The Mentalist*, *Hell on Wheels* and *Kings*; and

18 WHEREAS, recognition of Wes's artistic contributions and  
19 talents has followed him throughout his career; and

20 WHEREAS, in 2013, Wes was inducted into the national  
21 cowboy and western heritage museum's hall of great western  
22 performers; and

23 WHEREAS, in 2006, Wes received the golden boot award; in  
24 2009, he received the Santa Fe film festival lifetime  
25 achievement award; and, in 2019, Wes was inducted into the New

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1 Mexico film and television hall of fame; and

2 WHEREAS, Wes is an honorary member of the board of  
3 directors for silver bullet productions, an educational  
4 filmmaking program benefiting New Mexico Native American  
5 communities; and

6 WHEREAS, Wes is also an accomplished musician who plays  
7 bass and guitar in the band firecat of discord with his wife,  
8 singer Maura Dhu, primarily performing original music; and

9 WHEREAS, Wes has also authored two children's books, *The*  
10 *Adventures of Billy Bean* and *More Adventures of Billy Bean*, for  
11 the Cherokee bilingual and cross-cultural education center; and

12 WHEREAS, Wes is a skilled stone carver as well, working  
13 primarily in soapstone and other soft stones; and

14 WHEREAS, Wes remains a passionate activist and academic,  
15 taking a national leadership role in the promotion and  
16 preservation of indigenous languages, working as a language  
17 consultant on films and acting as a spokesperson for the  
18 indigenous language institute; and

19 WHEREAS, Wes and his wife, Maura Dhu, live in Santa Fe and  
20 have one son, Kholan, and Wes also has a son, Daniel, and a  
21 daughter, Leah, from a previous marriage; and

22 WHEREAS, by his artistic example and mentorship, Wes  
23 encourages the next generation of filmmakers and performers;

24 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF  
25 REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO that Wes Studi be

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1 honored as the embodiment of a changemaker whose life work  
2 celebrates Native Americans as well as being an inspiration to  
3 all who advocate for equality and social justice; and

4 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this memorial be  
5 transmitted to Wes Studi.

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