Argus Leader

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Needed: S.D. sponsors for Yellow Thunder bill

It's too bad that Bill Means, Dakota-American Indian Movement leader, didn't obtain sponsorship of the South Dakota delegation in Congress for the bill setting aside 800 acres of land for the Yellow Thunder Camp. We think South Dakota members of Congress should join its backers.

The sponsors are Reps. Jim Weaver, D-Oregon; Anthony Moffett, D-Conn., and Shirley Chisholm, D-N.Y. Chisholm said they are sponsoring the bill "to reinforce the importance of American Indian religious freedom and the need for full cooperation from federal agencies in protecting that freedom."

The bill would set aside 800 acres in the Black Hills National Forest as a cultural and religious resource area for 10 years. It would allow camp members to erect semi-permanent buildings and prevent use of the land for commercial users. Camp members would be allowed to hunt animals for their own use. They could not deny private persons or Forest Service personnel access to the camp.

Timely enactment of the bill would render moot the pending lawsuit in which the Forest Service seeks to evict Indian campers from the Yellow Thunder camp. It was set up 12 miles southwest of Rapid City last April.

The bill, it occurs to us, is a small step the government could take in acknowledging the reverence in which Indians hold the Black Hills. We'd also like to believe that South Dakotans would be receptive to Means' point that "Cowboys and Indians have got to work together to survive."

That is much better than either violent or legal confrontation. It also offers the prospect that South Dakota's Sioux Indians in time will bridge cultural and other gaps that have kept most of them out of the mainstream of the state's life and economy. That would be beneficial for both races.