



Smithsonian
National Museum of the American Indian

Office of the Director

September 10, 2019

Col. James T. Currie, USA (Ret.), Ph.D.
Executive Director
Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service
8201 Corporate Drive, Suite 1170
Landover, MD 20785

Dear Col. Currie,

Thank you for your letter of May 31, 2019, expressing your support for including the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Commissioned Officer Corps in the National Native American Veterans Memorial. As you know from previous correspondence, congressional legislation established the Memorial and directed the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian to design and construct it to honor Native members of the armed forces. The Act itself makes multiple references to service in the armed forces, namely the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and Coast Guard and does not mention the commissioned corps.

Over a 20 month period from October 2015 through June 2017, the Smithsonian consulted with tribal leaders, Native veterans, and others at 35 locations throughout the country, including Hawai'i and Alaska to discuss the Memorial's design and to solicit tribal opinion to guide the meaning, purpose and design of the Memorial. During these consultations, none of the tribal leaders, Native veterans or others who participated requested the inclusion of the NOAA and USPHS commissioned corps in the Memorial design. Instead, they focused on ways to effectively honor Native members of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and Coast Guard.

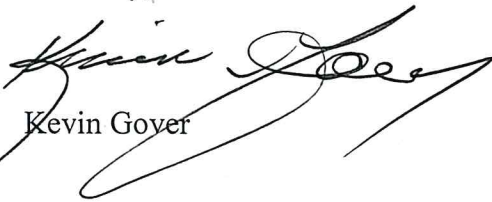
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The Smithsonian was not aware of an interest in recognizing the NOAA and USPHS commissioned corps until after these consultations had been completed. Nevertheless, the Museum reached back out to many of the Native people who had participated in the earlier consultations to seek their input. Although these individuals appreciate and respect the contribution of the Native Commissioned Corps members, they, along with the president of the National Congress of American Indians, also a veteran of the armed forces, do not believe that Congress intended this Memorial to provide recognition beyond the armed forces. Congress itself has recently confirmed that the purpose of the Act was to recognize Native members of the armed forces only.

The Memorial's design is complete and the Museum is moving forward with plans to build and install the winning design. We realize that this response may be disappointing and we do not mean to diminish the contribution of Native members of the commissioned corps. To that end, the Museum will consider other ways to acknowledge the contributions of NOAA and USPHS.

We thank you for your letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Gover", with a large, sweeping flourish extending from the end of the signature.

Kevin Gover