



## Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service

August 14, 2019

The Hon. Alex Azar  
Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I thought your 9 April 2019 letter to then-Secretary Skorton at the Smithsonian was just terrific. It made the case most eloquently and succinctly as to why the US Public Health Service should be included in the proposed National Native American Veterans Memorial. It unfortunately had no effect on the Smithsonian, which still plans to build a memorial that omits any mention of either the USPHS or the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

My organization has represented the Commissioned Corps of the USPHS since 1951, and we remain fully engaged in the effort to change the Smithsonian's position on this memorial. We thought your argument about the language in the 1994 and how it was not a limitation on the Smithsonian was quite persuasive. It may have been your letter, in fact, that caused the Smithsonian to change their response when asked about the memorial. Now, they tell us that the reason they cannot include the USPHS (and NOAA) in the memorial is that they held "listening sessions" with certain Native Americans, and no one ever brought up the issue of including the USPHS or NOAA in the memorial. Of course they didn't. Few Americans—including Native Americans—have any idea that PHS officers are veterans. The VA knows they are and recognizes them as such. My organization is one of twenty-five full members of the VA-run Veterans Day National Committee, for example.

We have written twice to the new Smithsonian Secretary, and he has not even given us the courtesy of a response. We understand that the Smithsonian is going to break ground on the memorial next month and that the USPHS and NOAA will not be part of it. This is a memorial to Native American veterans, and it will stand on the Mall forever, offering a misleading narrative as to the veteran status of USPHS officers.

We ask you to use the weight of your position to influence this decision, perhaps going to President Trump if necessary. We simply cannot allow this current memorial design to be implemented.

Sincerely,

Col. James T. Currie, USA (ret.)  
Executive Director