



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

September 6, 2019

The Hon. Patrick Leahy
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Leahy:

Perhaps you remember me from your days on the Select Committee on Intelligence back in the 1980s when I was Sen. Lloyd Bentsen's "designee" on the committee staff. I know you are very active in Smithsonian affairs, and I understand that you are the one who pushed the Smithsonian to adopt an information release policy modeled on the FOIA.

I am writing you today because the Smithsonian is about to commit a grave injustice by constructing a National Native American Veterans Memorial that leaves out two groups of Native American veterans: those who have earned this status through service in the US Public Health Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

We have reached out to the Smithsonian and received answers that are totally unresponsive. We have written twice to the new Smithsonian Secretary, and he has not even given us the courtesy of a response. We are told by Smithsonian public affairs that groundbreaking for the National Native American Veterans Memorial will be a closed-to-the-public ceremony on an unspecified date, a construct that I have never encountered for a public monument.

We thought we were past the days when a venerable institution like the Smithsonian would discriminate against Native American veterans, but it appears that such will happen unless someone like you steps in and persuades them to change the memorial design.

The fact is that the men and women who gained their veteran status in the USPHS and NOAA are veterans as much as is anyone who has ever served in uniform. The Veterans Affairs Department has determined that these men and women are veterans, entitled to all the rights and privileges thereof, including the ultimate honor of burial in a Veterans Affairs cemetery. How can the Smithsonian, which does not have special expertise in this area, conclude that some veterans are more worthy than others? How can the Smithsonian determine that a lack of widespread knowledge of the service rendered by these men and women is enough to justify their being left off the memorial that purports to honor all Native American Veterans? How can the Smithsonian, an institution that is

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based on facts and knowledge, ignore the facts and allow ignorance and lack of understanding determine what a monument should encompass?

National veterans groups urge that the USPHS and NOAA veterans be included in the memorial. Veterans of Foreign Wars, Vietnam Veterans of America, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Military Officers Association of America, Air Force Association, Air Force Sergeants Association, Association of the US Navy, Military Order of the Purple Heart, National Guard Association, Non-Commissioned Officers Association, The Retired Enlisted Association, Fleet Reserve Association, Marine Corps League, AMVETS, Army Aviation Association of America, Jewish War Veterans, Gold Star Wives of America, Army Warrant Officers Association, Coast Guard Warrant Officers Association, Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, Service Women's Action Network, and US Coast Guard Chief Petty Officers Association all have said publicly that they believe the memorial design should be changed to include USPHS and NOAA veterans.

I am enclosing the best article written on this subject. It was done by Voice of America, which does not circulate in the U.S. Please have your staff call me at 301 731-9080 if you wish more information.

Sincerely,

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