



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

September 18, 2019

The Hon. Jefferson Keel
President, National Congress of American Indians
Embassy of Tribal Nations
1516 P Street, NW
Washington, DC 20005

Dear President Keel:

We understand that groundbreaking for the Smithsonian's Native American Veterans memorial will occur soon, perhaps even before you receive this letter. We are extremely disappointed that this will not be a public ceremony, as such events should be conducted in full view of the public. This memorial will be built on public land, and it will tell every American who visits it that Native Americans who served in the US Public Health Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are not genuine veterans, deserving of the same honor as those who served in other uniforms.

Perhaps you can tell me who made this determination. The most recent letter we received from the Smithsonian places the blame for this discrimination directly on Native Americans. I do not accept that this is accurate, as this is a Smithsonian memorial, and the Smithsonian leadership is ultimately responsible for its design and construction. The Smithsonian leadership can attempt to shed its responsibility, but they are ultimately the ones who determined the design.

So far as I know, the Smithsonian leaders are not veterans themselves, so they have no inkling what it means to be told that "you are not a veteran" because you served in the USPHS and NOAA. You would undoubtedly react with outrage if I were to say that you are not a veteran yourself. I would react precisely the same way. So, how can anyone look any veteran in the face and say that they are unworthy of veteran status because of the uniform they wore? Only the very smallest percentage of Americans are veterans, and all of us who share this distinction need to stick together.

I ask you again to reach out to the Smithsonian and suggest to them that this needs to be an inclusive memorial, honoring ALL Native American veterans. I enclose for your information the ad we recently placed in *Roll Call*. Please look at the last bullet in it. We will never stop our efforts to prevent this injustice from being visited upon these Native American veterans.

Sincerely,

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