



# Commissioned Officers Association

of the U.S. Public Health Service

April 10, 2019

The Hon. Randy Reeves  
Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Reeves:

It was terrific to meet you and Ms. Decker last night at the MOAA reception. My organization is a member of The Military Coalition, and we work closely with MOAA on veterans issues.

As I mentioned to you, we have encountered an issue involving the Smithsonian's plans to build a National Native American Veterans Memorial which will not include the veterans of the US Public Health Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. I am enclosing my recent letter to Secretary Wilkie, which may, as I well know, never come to his attention.

We are asking you to address this issue with the Smithsonian, knowing that the right to be buried in a VA cemetery is the very best affirmation of veteran status. Our members have that right under the provisions of 42 U.S. Code § 213, which states:

**“(d) Active service deemed active military service with respect to laws administered by Secretary of Veterans Affairs**  
Active service of commissioned officers of the [US Public Health] Service shall be deemed to be active military service in the Armed Forces of the United States for the purposes of all laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs”

It seems to us that the Smithsonian is being completely wrong-headed in deciding to honor some Native American veterans, but not all Native American veterans.

We are enclosing a copy of the letter we sent to the Smithsonian Secretary on this matter. We have approached them repeatedly, and they are hung up on the wording of the 1994 law that allows creation of this memorial. That law unfortunately refers to the “Armed Forces of the United States,” though it is clear from reading the legislative history of this law that its sponsors intended to honor all native American veterans. Our officers, and those who gained their military service as members of the NOAA

