



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

January 14, 2020

The Hon. Lonnie Bunch
Secretary, The Smithsonian Institution
600 Maryland Ave SW
Washington, DC 20002

Dear Secretary Bunch:

It is time for the Smithsonian to decide whether it is going to be a world-class scientific and educational institution or a world-class hypocritical institution. I am referring to what we have only recently learned about the “listening sessions” that were cited so frequently as the reason why the Native American Veterans Memorial cannot include the US Public Health Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. I’m sure you remember that these listening sessions were cited because, according to the Smithsonian, Native American groups never brought up inclusion of the USPHS and NOAA in the memorial.

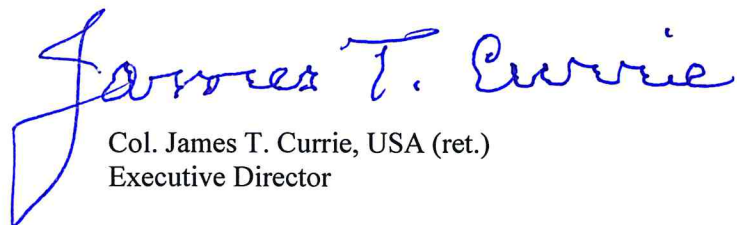
In May of last year I requested that the documents from those listening sessions be sent to me under the Smithsonian’s equivalent of FOIA. This was never done, much to my disappointment. I did, however, recently receive from Director Kevin Gover the “Consultation Report” for the sessions conducted with Native Americans from October 2015 to June 2017. On Page 7 of this report (enclosed) is the following startling statement, which you may never have seen:

“Attendees communicated clearly a number of universal themes:

The memorial must be inclusive, honoring all Native American veterans, including American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians, both men and women, and from all eras and branches of service.”

Here it is, laid out as clearly as it could possibly be expressed: “must be inclusive, honoring all Native American veterans” and “from all eras and branches of service.” How can the Smithsonian publish a document that contains this language and still say that PHS and NOAA officer veterans will not be honored by the memorial? “Honoring all Native American veterans” from “all . . . branches of service.” How much clearer could it be? Maybe you were unaware of this report, but now there is no excuse. The Smithsonian can do what is right, or it can continue to ignore two groups of Native American veterans. The choice is yours. It is not too late to correct the mistake.

Sincerely,


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

Attendees communicated clearly a number of universal themes:

- The memorial must be inclusive, honoring all Native American veterans, including American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians, both men and women, and from all eras and branches of service.
- The memorial should recognize the great sacrifices made and support given by the families of those who serve.
- A preference was expressed for locating the memorial on the quieter, north side of the museum grounds to allow for a peaceful and contemplative experience, as well as proximity to the museum's flowing water feature.
- The memorial should convey a sense of Native spirituality, including a space for reflection and cleansing.
- The memorial should be a place of healing for veterans and their families and for the service members returning home. Many veterans expressed pain and sorrow that they still feel about their experiences, and the need for healing to be a part of memorializing their service.

**“In our heart, this is still our land, so we’re fighting still
for our land.”**

—Mitchelene BigMan (Crow/Hidatsa), NNAVM Advisory Committee

These recommendations shaped the criteria by which submissions were evaluated in an open, juried, international design competition. Artists, designers, architects, and others submitted their initial ideas for the memorial by accessing a custom website designed specifically for this competition. Five semi-finalists were invited by the jurors to present their designs to the jury and the public in February 2018. Final design presentations will occur throughout the spring with an announcement of the winner anticipated in the summer of 2018.