

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

November 26, 2021

The Honorable Jack Reed
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable James Inhofe
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Adam Smith
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mike Rogers
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Reed, Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Inhofe, and Ranking Member Rogers:

We write to you today as you work to finalize the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022 (NDAA). On September 23, 2021, the House of Representatives passed the NDAA including a provision that would revoke the Medals of Honor awarded to the perpetrators of the Wounded Knee Massacre.¹ The provision was included in the House passed NDAA by a voice vote.² As you continue negotiations, we urge you to ensure that this provision is included in the final legislation.

On December 29, 1890, U.S. Army soldiers mercilessly slaughtered hundreds of defenseless Lakota men, women, and children at Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota during what came to be known as the Wounded Knee Massacre.³ On December 17, 1891, almost a year later, 20 soldiers who had committed the massacre were awarded the Medal of Honor.⁴ The Wounded Knee Massacre was part of the larger series of military encounters between Native Americans and the U.S. Military known as the “Indian Wars” campaigns.⁵

¹ Native News Online, “‘Remove the Stain Act’ Moves Forward as House Passes Defense Bill,” Native News Online Staff, September 24, 2021, <https://nativenewsonline.net/currents/house-of-representatives-passes-remove-the-stain-act>.

² House Armed Services Committee, “H.R. 4350 Floor Amendments,” September 27, 2021, pp. 3, https://armedservices.house.gov/_cache/files/c/8/c8eec23b-839a-44f8-b0bb-2232eb4784f7/46F1CC6B14E416D7284FF93673541776.fy22ndaamendmenttracker-30-20210927-1156.pdf.

³ S.Con.Res. 153 (101st Congress).

⁴ Jerry Green, “The Medals of Wounded Knee,” *Nebraska History* 75 (1994), pp. 200-208, <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH1994MedalsWKnee.pdf>.

⁵ U.S. Army Center of Military History, “Indian War Campaigns,” https://history.army.mil/html/reference/army_flag/iw.html.

The Medal of Honor is the highest military honor awarded across service branches and should be reserved for actions of “gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty.”⁶ The awards bestowed on the U.S. Army personal who perpetrated the Wounded Knee Massacre were not gallant or heroic. By allowing the perpetrators to continue to bear the highest military honor, we further glorify this shameful event in our nation’s history.

The U.S Congress acknowledged the atrocities of the U.S. Army’s actions at Wounded Knee more than 30 years ago. The 101st Congress adopted a concurrent resolution acknowledging the 100th anniversary of the massacre and “expresse[d] its deep regret on behalf of the United States” for the “terrible tragedy.”⁷ This was an important step in the federal government recognizing the U.S. Army’s action at Wounded Knee. However, over 30 years later and the awarded medals are still conferred on the perpetrators.

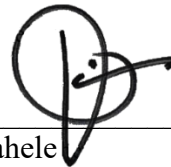
Native American communities have long called for the federal government to act to right this historical misstep. The National Congress of American Indians adopted a resolution calling for the Wounded Knee Medals of Honor to be revoked and stated that the awards to the perpetrators of this massacre “dishonors the Medals of Honor and is a message of hostility and genocide by the United States against the Great Sioux Nation and our precious relatives who were massacred at Wounded Knee.”⁸ The Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe passed a resolution in 2001 calling on the federal government to “renounce the issuance of said medals” and stated that these medals should be “null and void” in light of the violence towards unarmed noncombatants.⁹

The House Armed Services Committee passed the NDAA with a provision that would revoke these wrongly conferred honors. As you finalize the NDAA this year, we call on you to ensure these provisions are included in the final legislation. The Wounded Knee Massacre was over 130 years ago, and yet the actions of the U.S. Army and the Medals of Honor bestowed to the perpetrators remain a persistent stain on the nation. We ask you to take action and revoke these undue honors.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



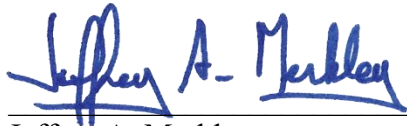
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Member of Congress

⁶ 32 CFR 578.4.

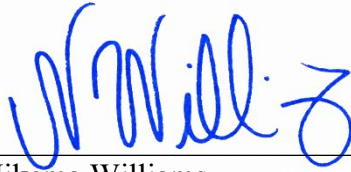
⁷ S.Con.Res. 153 (101st Congress). See also H.Con.Res. 386 (101st Congress).

⁸ National Congress of American Indians, Resolution #ABQ-19-074: To Support Legislation to Revoke the Medals of Honor Issued to Seventh Cavalry Soldiers for Actions During the Massacre of Wounded Knee, October 20-25, 2019, <https://www.ncai.org/ABQ-19-074.pdf>.

⁹ Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, Resolution No. 132-01-CR, June 13, 2001, <https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/12.%20CRST%20Res.%20Rescind%20Medals%20Reso%202001.pdf>.



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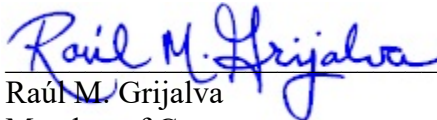
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United States Senator



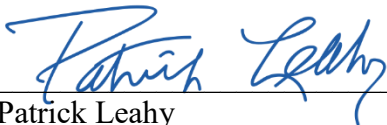
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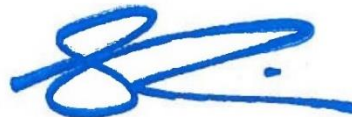
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