

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 6, 2024

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III  
Secretary of Defense  
U.S. Department of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon,  
Washington, DC 20301-1000

The Honorable Deb Haaland  
Secretary of Interior  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington DC 20240

Dear Secretary Austin and Secretary Haaland:

We commend your decision to establish a Special Review Panel to evaluate the Medals of Honor awarded to U.S. soldiers who participated in the Wounded Knee Massacre. We understand that the panel will undertake an objective review to assess each Medal of Honor awarded. This review process depends on the panel being able to access a strong foundation of evidence. Thus, we urge the Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of Interior (DoI) to establish a process that allows sufficient time for stakeholders and experts to gather and submit relevant information.

On July 19, 2024, Secretary Austin directed DoD to convene a panel to review each medal awardee's individual actions during the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890, and to recommend whether each medal should or should not be rescinded.<sup>1</sup> We welcome that DoD will finally revisit the legitimacy of these medals 134 years after the Massacre.

Importantly, the Secretary of the Army was directed to furnish its own historical records by July 26, 2024. We urge DoD and DoI not to impose the Army's July 26th deadline on external stakeholders. Instead, we ask that you continue accepting documentation and testimonies from the public on a rolling basis with a deadline that provides sufficient time for submission. The public did not learn about the panel until July 24, 2024,<sup>2</sup> which provided stakeholders only two days to submit information prior to the July 26th deadline. Stakeholders — including Tribes, descendants of the victims, historical societies, individual historians, and academic institutions — possess a wealth of information that is critical for the panel's consideration. Much of that information may take more than just a matter of days to gather. Additionally, many critical stakeholders may not have the resources to operate on an overly compressed timeline.

---

<sup>1</sup> Secretary of Defense, "Review of Medals of Honor Awarded for Actions Related to the Engagement at Wounded Knee," July 19, 2024, <https://media.defense.gov/2024/Jul/24/2003509466/-1/-1/1/WOUNDED-KNEE-MOH-REVIEW-SD-MEMO-SIGNED.PDF>.


<sup>2</sup> Associated Press, "Pentagon panel to review Medals of Honor given to soldiers at the Wounded Knee massacre," Lolita C. Baldor, July 24, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/pentagon-medals-soldiers-wounded-knee-7c6a7cfd2b2d9ce6b4ce0d9731439cb4>.

We appreciate the urgency to conduct this review in an expeditious manner and to make recommendations by October 15, 2024. We also hope this collaborative process includes DoD and DoI providing easy, mutual access to the records each agency receives.

This review process is long overdue. We are greatly interested in seeing a review process that is informed by stakeholders' documentation and testimonies. Thus, we ask that you continue to accept submissions of relevant evidence on a rolling basis until a reasonable deadline.


Thank you for your attention to this important matter, and we look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



---

Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



---

M. Michael Rounds  
United States Senator