

S. Joe Crittenden
Deputy Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation
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H.R. 2319 (Mullin), “Native American Veterans’ Memorial Amendments Act of 2013”

Osiyo.

Chairman Young, Ranking Member Hanabusa, Congressman Mullin and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. It is an honor to talk about this important legislation, H.R. 2319, the “Native American Veterans’ Memorial Amendments Act.”

My name is S. Joe Crittenden. I am Deputy Principal Chief of the largest sovereign tribal nation in the country – the Cherokee Nation – and the subject of this legislation is very close to my heart. I served this great nation in the U.S. Navy and I am a Vietnam veteran. I know firsthand the extreme sacrifices that are made during war and military conflicts. I am proud of all the contributions Cherokees and American Indians have made to America and to the U.S. military.

The Native American Veterans’ Memorial is important because Native Americans serve at a higher rate than any other racial group in this country, and we serve in the Navy more than any other branch. Throughout centuries, many fine young Native men and women have served. To all of them, through the generations, we owe a debt of gratitude. They are true American heroes and deserve to be included when Americans come to the U.S. Capital to remember their veterans. Yet, of all the monuments that are in Washington, DC, none of them stand to recognize Native veterans.

The Cherokee Nation has invested \$1.6 million in building our own Veterans Center. We also set aside time each month during Tribal Council to honor three men or women who have fought for their country with a Warrior Award. Recently, upon receiving this award, a veteran told me it had been 44 years since he had served. No one outside his family had thanked him. Honoring and taking care of the very people who keep us free is our way of showing appreciation where it is deserved. It’s the right thing to do.

This legislation would allow the Museum of American Indian to build a memorial on the museum’s grounds. It would also open up fundraising ability for the Museum of the American Indian, and not limit it only to the National Congress of American Indians. These will open doors for others to learn about Native people, to financially support the Memorial, and make it more likely to be built.

Today I would like to thank all of you for the display of bipartisan support for this memorial. It is a long overdue opportunity to honor Native veterans in an appropriate and meaningful way. I am filled with hope at this opportunity to keep our history alive and pay respect to the departed.

To Cherokee citizen Congressman Mullin, our Congressional representative– my sincerest thanks to you for taking the lead on this and getting it done. You understand that Native Americans’ heritage as soldiers is something this country must take pride in and something that must be preserved.

Wado. Thank you.