

STATEMENT OF
JACQUELINE PATA
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE
NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS
REGARDING THE NATIVE AMERICAN VETERANS'
MEMORIAL ACT OF 2013
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
JULY 23, 2013

Honorable Chairman Young, Ranking Member Hanabusa, and Members of the Subcommittee on Indian and Alaska Native Affairs

My name is Jacqueline Pata and I am the Executive Director of the National Congress of American Indians, the oldest and largest national tribal government advocacy organization in the country.

The NCAI thanks the Subcommittee for conducting this Hearing on important issues on behalf of native peoples and for the opportunity to present our views on H.R. 2319, "The Native American Veterans' Memorial Act of 2013."

As a daughter of a Korean War veteran, the mother of a member of the US Coast Guard, and mother-in-law of a twice-deployed Iraq War veteran, I can relate to the many native individuals and whose family members honorably and continually serve in the military in defense of our homeland and this country.

The NCAI has provided testimony numerous times and respectfully share that American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) have proudly served in the United States military since the Revolutionary War. From earlier struggles such as the Spanish-American War to the present-day conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, native people continue to serve at higher percentages than any other ethnic group. With their warrior tradition and the sacrifices that have been made, it is vital to create sound policies and programs to promote the overall well being of our Native veterans.

Though the AI/AN population is less than 1 percent of the total U.S. population, they comprise about 1.6 percent of the armed forces. In some tribal communities, 1 out of every 200 adults served in the military. Currently more than 24,000 active duty military members are AI/AN. These high rates of service reflect a tremendous need - perhaps more than ever - for increased programs and services available for returning tribal veterans.

During the complete history of this country American Indians and Alaska Natives courageously served and many gave their lives for and Indian Country shall always be indebted for the valor and service.

Mr. Chairman, NCAI is grateful that Representative Markwayne Mullin from Oklahoma has stepped forward and introduced this legislation. When enacted, we believe this legislation will provide a path forward to completion of the memorial and an appropriate means for paying tribute to and acknowledging the sacrifices of American Indian and Alaska Native citizens who have courageously served and those who have given their lives asking nothing in return.

The greatest barrier to the establishment of the memorial is the significant cost. The 1994 enactment of P.L. 103-384, "The Native American Veterans' Memorial Establishment Act of 1994", has been discussed periodically by NCAI Veterans Committee members which includes NCAI Board members. While there is ongoing discussion on the exact location and design of the memorial, there is agreement that legislation is needed to attract a broader avenue of fundraising sources for the memorial. Section 4 of the 1994 law bestowed full responsibility for all expenses related to the memorial upon NCAI.

I have discussed this matter with Kevin Gover, Director of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) and we both agree it makes sense for our two institutions to partner together to accomplish the important task of creating this memorial. Our institutions have a history of a collaborative working relationship as NCAI was instrumental in creating and supporting the establishment of the NMAI. Through outstanding leadership of Mr. Richard West and now Director Gover, Indian Country and this nation has a world-class museum that accurately portrays the histories and cultures of Native America.

The NCAI is confident that all matters related to the completion of this historic commemoration to the contributions of American Indian and Alaska Native warriors also will be as prestigious under the direction and partnership with NMAI. NCAI is willing to help in any capacity we can to bring to fruition what the proposed momentous legislation will enable. NCAI and its Veteran's Committee will continue to solicit input from native veterans whose insight on this matter is valued and essential.

I also want to note that NCAI is aware that the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs is considering companion legislation (S.1046) which we support as well.

Mr. Chairman, the powerful tradition of Native American patriotism finds its clearest expression in the service of young Native men and women. It is a key component of modern tribal life. Thank you again on behalf of the National Congress of American Indians for taking the time to conduct this hearing and to provide the opportunity to hear from our organization.