

Testimony of Kevin Gover
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Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. I am honored to be here today to discuss the work of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian concerning Native American veterans. As you might expect, programming, research, and exhibitions concerning the contributions of Native American veterans is a large part of our work at the NMAI. Service in the Armed Forces of the United States is a strong tradition among many Native nations, and the acknowledgement of Native veterans has therefore become embedded in the cultures, traditions, and histories of many Native communities.

Our programming at the NMAI has included many events relating to Native veterans. Just in the few years since I arrived at the NMAI, we have had Veterans' Day and Memorial Day programming relating to Native service in the Armed Forces. Our film and video program occasionally presents films relating to Native veterans, and we have had several authors of books about Native veterans present their work at the museum.

Perhaps our most significant treatment of the subject is the traveling exhibition that the NMAI created. It is titled *Native Words, Native Warriors*. The exhibition explores the service of Native American communication specialists who used their Native languages to develop codes that could not be broken by the enemies of the United States in World War I and World War II. *Native Words, Native Warriors* tells the remarkable story of Indian soldiers from more than a dozen tribes who used their Native languages in the service of the U.S. military. The exhibition was designed to travel to other museums, cultural centers, and libraries, and through the Smithsonian Institution's Traveling Exhibition Service, it has found many homes and received enthusiastic responses from a broad range of audiences.

As you know, the NMAI has also been authorized by Congress to "construct and maintain a National Native American Veterans' Memorial." Several limitations on that authority make it unlikely that we will be able to build such a Memorial. First, the statute requires that the Memorial be located "within the interior structure" of the NMAI's museum on the National Mall. This limits our options in locating a permanent Memorial, given the limited space available within the Mall museum.

Second, the statute places a great deal of responsibility on the National Congress of American Indians, rather than the NMAI, to develop the Memorial. NCAI is authorized by the

law “to hold a competition to select the design of the Memorial.” Further, the statute provides that the National Congress of American Indians “shall be solely responsible for acceptance of contributions for, and payment of expenses of, the establishment of the Memorial.” Finally, the statute prohibits any use of federal funds to pay for any expense related to the establishment of the Memorial.

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, and we could not present the histories and cultures of Native America without delving deeply into this subject. We will continue to do so as opportunities arise.

I would be pleased to answer any questions the committee might have.