

House Natural Resources
The Honorable Dusty Johnson
Indian and Insular Affairs Subcommittee Hearing
June 7, 2023

Chair Hageman, Ranking Member Leger Fernández, and Members of the Indian and Insular Affairs Subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the subcommittee today. I am here to speak on my bill, the *Wounded Knee Massacre Memorial and Sacred Site Act*. On December 29th, 1890, in the final armed conflict of the Indian Wars, the 7th Cavalry of the U.S. Army committed one of the most heinous atrocities against Indians.

In the late 1880s, a movement called the Ghost Dance swept across the nation. American Indians believed that this dance would bring about a renewal of Native society, putting a stop to being pushed off ancestral lands, starvation, and a decline of Native society. In 1883, Secretary of Interior Henry Teller referred to similar dances as “a great hindrance to the civilization of the Indians.”¹

On December 15th, 1890, Sitting Bull and some of his followers, a few of which were believers in the Ghost Dance, were killed in an armed conflict with the Standing Rock Indian Reservation police, when they attempted to arrest Sitting Bull. Several members of Sitting Bull’s band fled for the Cheyenne River Indian Reservation and joined Chief Spotted Elk’s band, headed for the Pine Ridge Reservation.²

On December 28th, 1890, Spotted Elk’s band – largely consisting of women and children – were stopped by the Army’s 7th Cavalry and made camp at Wounded Knee Creek. The next morning, troops began to disarm the Lakota. A struggle occurred between some of the Lakota and troops and a shot rang out. The troops then fired on the largely unarmed group, resulting in the deaths of approximately 350-375 Lakota Indians.

On the 100th anniversary of this massacre, Congress issued a formal apology to the Lakota and expressed deep regret for what happened at Wounded Knee, South Dakota.³ In October 2022, the Oglala Sioux Tribe and Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe jointly purchased 40 acres of land where an old trading post was located, which was previously privately-owned. This land lies in the boundaries of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation and is believed to be the killing field.

It is my great honor to assist these South Dakota tribes in placing these 40 acres in restricted fee status through the *Wounded Knee Massacre Memorial and Sacred Site Act*. This bill allows both tribes to protect the land by prohibiting any development, taxation by any state or local government, and prevents the land from being sold without the consent of Congress and both tribes.

¹ Price, Hiram. *Rules Governing The Court of Indian Offenses*. March 30, 1883.

<https://commons.und.edu/indigenous-gov-docs/131/>.

² Warren, Louis. *The Lakota Ghost Dance and the Massacre at Wounded Knee*. April 16, 2021.

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/american-oz-lakota-ghost-dance-massacre-wounded-knee/>.

³ S.Con.Res.153. 101st Congress. (1990). Retrieved from Congress.gov website:

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/101st-congress/senate-concurrent-resolution/153/text>.

We have an obligation to acknowledge our nation's mistakes and to work with Indian nations to right the wrongs of history. For the past six months, I have worked together with both tribes to introduce this legislation.

I would like to express my gratitude to Former President Kevin Killer of the Oglala Sioux Tribe and Former Chairman Harold Frazier of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe for their leadership in the purchase of this land last year. Without their efforts, we would not be able to have this important discussion today.

I would also like to recognize a representative of the Wounded Knee descendants, Mr. Cedric Broken Nose of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, who is here today.

Finally, thank you to Wounded Knee descendants, President Frank Star Comes Out of the Oglala Sioux Tribe and Chairman Ryman LeBeau of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, for their teamwork and dedication to these efforts. I appreciate them being here today to speak on this bill and look forward to their testimony.

Thank you again for holding this hearing. I look forward to working with the committee on passing my bill to protect this sacred land for future generations.