



**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF TRIBAL HISTORIC
PRESERVATION OFFICERS**

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June 2, 2025

Secretary Doug Burgum
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW, Washington,
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Burgum,

The National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (NATHPO) asks you to reconsider “Secretarial Order 3431 - Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History.” The Secretarial Order discourages a thoughtful understanding of the damage inflicted upon Tribal Nations and indigenous communities both by the United States government and American citizens empowered by the government.

NATHPO is the only national organization devoted to supporting Tribal historic preservation programs. Founded in 1998, NATHPO is a 501(c)(3) non-profit membership association of Tribal government officials who implement federal and Tribal preservation laws. NATHPO empowers Tribal preservation leaders protecting culturally important places that perpetuate Native identity, resilience, and cultural endurance. Connections to cultural heritage sustain the health and vitality of Native peoples.

We are particularly concerned the Secretarial Order instructs Bureaus and Offices within DOI “to ensure that all public monuments, memorials, statues, markers, or similar properties within the Department’s jurisdiction do not contain descriptions, depictions, or other content that inappropriately disparage Americans past or living (including persons living in colonial times), and instead focus on the greatness of the achievements and progress of the American people or, with respect to natural features, the beauty, abundance, and grandeur of the American landscape.”

The Secretarial Order appears to instruct federal agencies to obscure the efforts on the part of the government to eradicate vibrant Indigenous cultures, which led to the deaths of untold numbers of people and threatened the very existence of peoples who have called this land home since time immemorial.

In order to do true justice to the history of the United States of America, its government must acknowledge and tell its entire story. There is no denying Tribal Nations and Indigenous communities across the United States suffered violence and oppression at the hands of the Federal Government, and of the colonial powers who preceded it.

The history of Tribal Nations is rooted in both struggle and strength—marked by profound injustice, yet also by contributions that have helped shape the very best of America. Native veterans, for example, served bravely in every major U.S. conflict long before individual Native people were granted American citizenship, demonstrating loyalty and sacrifice in the face of exclusion. From those difficult times emerged enduring contributions—from Jim Thorpe’s athletic legacy to the Indigenous foundations of democratic governance and the heroism of the Code Talkers—that continue to define American excellence. This history is not solely one of survival, but of shaping a nation through resilience, leadership, and cultural brilliance. Indeed, both Jim Thorpe and several of the Navajo Code Talkers

PROTECTING NATIVE PLACES

attended Indian Boarding Schools. It would be dishonest and irresponsible to tell their stories without also telling the full story of the Indian Boarding School Program, which if it had been fully successful, would have eradicated Navajo and numerous other Native languages that comprised the unbreakable code during World War II.

Telling the whole story is not about diminishing the achievements of the United States—it is about honoring the full truth of how those achievements came to be. Many of America’s most celebrated milestones were made possible through the displacement of Tribal Nations, the seizure of Indigenous lands, and the suppression of Native languages and traditions. Acknowledging both the harm and the contributions does not weaken our national narrative—it strengthens it by making it honest, comprehensive, and worthy of all those who call this country home. Should you choose to follow through with this Secretarial Order, we urge you and your staff at the Interior Department to engage in consultation with Tribal Nations and other communities to ensure you do not preside over the erasure of stories that so desperately need to be told.

Preserving and publicly retelling the stories of America’s Indigenous peoples – in their entirety – is a necessary part of healing for Tribal Nations and other Native communities, a critical part of ensuring their health and vitality and allowing them to thrive both now and in the future.

Thank you for considering our concerns about the Secretarial Order. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to discuss this matter or if I can be helpful in any other way.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Valerie J. Grussing". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Valerie J. Grussing, PhD
Executive Director