



# Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council

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Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke  
222 North 32 Street, Suite 900  
Billings, Montana 59101

Dear Secretary Zinke:

We know as you do that every generation inherits a world it never made; and, as it does so, it automatically becomes the trustee of that world for those who come after. In due course, each generation makes its own accounting to its children. Therefore we reach out to you today on a matter that demands justice, courage and ultimately honor. You have many times visited our council in the shadow of the "Backbone of the World" as we spoke these very words and how to make a better life for our children. You as former military man know these words. You know they served not only as your military code of conduct but also a code of conduct for how one should walk in this world.

We speak to you now of the cold winters day of January 23, 1870. A day when the temperature was forty below zero on the bluffs overlooking the Marias River known as the Big Bend. One can see the 2nd Cavalry led by the inebriated Major Eugene Baker as he approaches the smallpox infected camp of the Piegan Chief Heavy Runner. One can hear the cries and screams of the 217 Piegan (Blackfeet) Indians, many of them women and children who would be massacred on that morning. After the initial killing had stopped Lieutenant Gustavus Cheyney Doane, 2nd Cavalry ordered that any Piegan prisoners should be finished off with axes. A horrifying description would later appear in the Army Navy Journal of that day. "This Piegan village has vanished with its inmates. The blackened spots of the lodges destroyed by fire, ghastly corpses strewn around, ravens flitting to and fro, and cowardly wolves snarling and snapping at their feast."

But today there is no monument, no memorial for this hallowed ground for the souls who wander this world seeking nothing but soft brown earth, grass waving above their heads and silence. They seek no yesterday, no tomorrow. They seek to forget time, to forget life, to be at peace.

We know that death is not eternal but dishonor is and while we as Indian people have endured much dishonorable historical myth making we cannot nor will we be discouraged from the task that lies before us. Therefore we ask you, our trustee, to bring an end to this chapter of dishonorable myth making. We ask you to bring an end to the memorialization of this man, this war criminal, Lieutenant Gustavus Cheyney Doane whose very name marks a mountain in our aboriginal sacred ground now known as Yellowstone Park. We also ask you to end the Yellowstone Park memorialization of Dr. Ferdinand V. Hayden who called for the "compassionate extermination" of our people and whose name is now honored by a valley which is now inhabited by our sacred bison.

We are taught as young native children not to fear the path of truth for the lack of people walking on it. We are taught not to be imprisoned by history but to be informed by it. You, our Montana brother have spoken words of truth to us before, you can do so again and with such words of truth and grace you can honor the memory of the loved and lost and thus bring peace to their souls.

Respectfully,

William F. Snell, Jr., Executive Director  
Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council

Cc: US Board of Geographic Names

