



THE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

July 7, 2020

The Honorable Mark Takano
Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for your June 18, 2020, letter to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) regarding your request to change VA's current motto.

VA is not memorializing an "outdated" motto at our cemeteries. We are memorializing a piece of one of the most important speeches ever delivered by a President to the Nation; one that laid out the mission this Department continues today. President Lincoln's second inaugural address was an historic and successful attempt to bind the Union together and, as you acknowledged, his words were about "the obligation to care for all who had endured the conflict and for their families." When we begin to disassemble President Lincoln's powerful statement, we sow the kind of divisions that President Lincoln sought to heal.

Attempts to rewrite history are dangerous, especially the history surrounding President Lincoln's second inaugural speech. In many ways, that speech marked the birth of this Nation as we know it today – one that showed it will shed blood to ensure freedom and liberty for every citizen, not just some. While the critical theory that calls for the destruction of our history and our institutions is in fashion, this part of our history is not one that should ever suffer revisionist edits or parsing.

Your request also leads me to wonder why President Lincoln's use of gender-specific pronouns requires a remedy, when their use elsewhere is tolerable. For example, the Congress in which you are a member is governed by a Constitution that refers in several places to "he" or "him." The concerns you raise might equally suggest that Congress has never evolved beyond the Founders' vision and is unwelcoming to everyone other than men and excludes people based on their gender or sexual orientation. Yet, no one believes this is so. Today, Americans understand the timeless intent of the Constitution, just as they can comprehend the timeless spirit of President Lincoln's words.

Furthermore, there is no evidence to show that highlighting a quote that conferred upon VA its noble mission will make Veterans feel "unwelcome" at VA. In fact,

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in the last year alone, female Veteran Trust has increased by 12%. We should not dilute the powerful words that brought us to this moment in time and that continue to inspire all Americans to do better.

Should you have further questions, please have a member of your staff contact Ms. Taniesha Kelly, Congressional Relations Officer, at 202-461-0624 or at Taniesha.Kelly@va.gov.

Thank you for your continued support of our mission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Pamela Powers", with a stylized, cursive script.

Pamela Powers