



NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

June 17, 2003

Arizona Republic
200 East Van Buren St.
Phoenix, AZ 85004

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Dear Editor:

On behalf of the membership of the National Congress of American Indians, I write to encourage the people of Arizona to retain the names of Piastewa Peak and Piastewa Freeway and reject efforts to revert to their previous site names, Squaw Peak and Squaw Peak Parkway.

The National Congress of American Indians is the largest and oldest organization of tribal governments in the United States. With a membership of over 250 tribal governments, NCAI is the most visible organization supporting the priorities of tribal governments on the national level. We have been fortunate to hold our annual Mid-Year Session this week on the Gila River Indian Community, meeting with leaders from the state of Arizona, including Gov. Janet Napolitano.

It is with the unanimous consent of the NCAI Executive Council that I write to urge you to stand behind the actions of changing the names of Squaw Peak and Squaw Peak Parkway to honor Private First Class Lori Ann Piastewa.

The term "squaw" was first used among trappers in New England as a derogatory term for Indian women. It is derived from the Mohawk phrase "gee squaw," which is a vulgar description of female genitalia. Given the history of the word, and the hurtful manner with which it has been used in the past, NCAI dismisses its use and thanks the Board for changing the name to honor a hero.

The Arizona Board on Geographic and State Names showed great wisdom in its decision to honor PFC Lori Ann Piastewa for her sacrifice. A true hero, PFC Piastewa now occupies a place in history as the first Native American woman in the armed forces killed in combat. The state will honor her memory by rejecting a misogynistic and racist term that has been used to demean and dishonor women like PFC Piastewa, and opting instead to recognize the contributions that she and others like her have made to the health and security of this country.

By dropping the use of the term "squaw," the Board rejects racism and disrespect towards Native women, plain and simple. Through NCAI, tribes from across the nation have supported the name change, and on behalf of NCAI's member tribes, I urge the state to retain the names of Piastewa Peak and Piastewa Freeway as a symbol of honor in perpetuity.

Sincerely,

Tex G. Hall
President, NCAI