MEMORANDUM FOR: SEE DISTRIBUTION

SUBJECT: 2019 Department of Defense National American Indian and Alaskan Native Heritage Month

The Department of Defense (DoD) recognizes November as American Indian and Alaskan Native (AI/AN) Heritage Month. It is during this month that we celebrate and honor the Department’s AI/AN military and civilian workforce for their contributions and selfless sacrifices, in addition to recognizing the rich and diverse cultures and the traditions of the Native people.

As far back as the Civil War, our Nation has benefitted from the distinguished service of the AI/AN people. They have fought heroically and have displayed acts of patriotism, innovation, and courage well before becoming recognized as citizens of the United States. During World War I, they served as Indian Scouts and auxiliary troops, and they served as cryptologists during World War II. Individuals like Petty Officer 2nd Class Michael E. Thornton, a Medal of Honor recipient, risked his life during a hail of gunfire to rescue his wounded superior officer in Vietnam, and Private Minnie Spotted-Wolf of Heart Butte, Montana, became the first American Indian woman to enlist in the Marine Corps Women’s Reserve as a heavy equipment operator.

In recent years, America’s original people have served in the military at the highest rate of any ethnic group in the United States, per capita. Today, there are over 22,000 military and civilian AI/AN people within DoD who serve our Nation at home and abroad. AI/AN people have served and continue to serve in our nation’s armed forces when duty calls, even in the face of historical persecution and broken promises.

Successful military service requires individuals who serve to be strong, brave, proud, and wise. All of these traits define the culture and warrior ethos of the AI/AN people, and it is a pleasure to celebrate their patriotism and commitment to preserving the security of our nation.

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