



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council, Coshatta Tribe of Louisiana, and Global Indigenous Council, in Collaboration with Pretty Shield Foundation, Participate Tuesday in the National Moment of Unity and Remembrance to Lives Lost to COVID-19

Illuminated Teepee on Sacrifice Cliff Honors Native Americans Lost in Pandemic

The National Moment of Unity and Remembrance is Part of The Inauguration of President-elect Joseph R. Biden, Jr. and Vice President-elect Kamala D. Harris

BILLINGS, Montana — Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council (RMTLC), Coshatta Tribe of Louisiana, Global Indigenous Council, and the International Romani Union, in collaboration with the Pretty Shield Foundation, are honored to participate in a national moment of unity and remembrance to lives lost to COVID-19 today by illuminating a teepee on Sacrifice Cliff in Swords Park, Billings.

The memorial will take place in Washington D.C. and nationwide on Jan. 19, 2021 starting at 3:30 p.m. MT (5:30 p.m. ET) and continuing thereafter in cities and towns across the country. The memorial will feature the lighting of the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool, and the illumination of buildings and ringing of church bells in a national moment of unity and remembrance. The program will emphasize the importance of looking back and remembering the lives we've lost to COVID-19 as we look forward to the hope of a new path and a brighter future.

"The inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris represents the beginning of a new national journey. However, in the midst of a pandemic – when so many Americans are grieving the loss of family, friends, and neighbors – it is important that we honor those who have died, reflect on what has been one of the more challenging periods in this nation's history, and renew our commitment to coming together to unite our country, end the pandemic, and rebuild our nation," said Presidential Inaugural Committee Communications Director Pili Tobar.

The lighting of the teepee on Sacrifice Cliff will honor those lost to the coronavirus and those lost to another pandemic brought almost two centuries ago to our Native lands. This sacred site is named to honor the 15 Crow warriors who rode horses over the cliff to their deaths after returning from a scouting mission to find their loved ones and friends among the dead at a tribal camp nearly wiped out by a smallpox outbreak in the mid-19th century, and two Crow warriors where the White Horse Went Down. Distraught and overcome with grief, the warriors put blinders on their horses and rode them off the sandstone cliffs to their deaths.

"Today we return home, seeking refuge in our teepees, our beacons of hope. We share our grief, hope, strength and resolve with all those who have traveled on and those still among us," said Tom Rodgers, a Blackfeet and president of the Global Indigenous Council. "We will remember those taken by a merciless pestilence, and when we will tell their stories we will speak of how they lived when they walked among us. Like the Civil War nurse Walt Whitman, who observed while standing in the blood of the fallen that

death can provide the ultimate reconciliation, we need not fear sisters Death and Night as they softly but incessantly wash again and ever again our soiled nation.”

“Indigenous people. Black and Hispanic people, marginalized communities here as across the hemispheres have been hit the hardest by COVID-19, losing our loved ones and elders. The cultural impact from the loss of so many of our wisdom keepers is incalculable,” said Tashi Mathuin, International Romani Union youth council ambassador.

Over the holidays, the RMTLC raised the “Beacons of Hope” illuminated teepees in the same area to provide comfort and healing to those who lost loved ones in 2020. The RMTLC represents every tribal nation in Montana, plus tribes in Idaho and Wyoming, as well as the Piikani Nation in Canada.

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