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Kwentoria A. Williams, Communications Director
Cell Phone: 202-430-0125
Email: algreenpress@mail.house.gov

Congressman Al Green and Senator Warren Introduce the Reconciliation in Place Names Act

(Houston, TX) – On Friday, July 16, 2021, Congressman Al Green and Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) introduced the Reconciliation in Place Names Act. Originally introduced last year with then-Congresswoman Deb Haaland (D-N.M.), this bill would address land units and geographic features with racist and bigoted names.

Public lands are a part of the fabric of America that are meant to welcome everyone; however, thousands of geographic features, national forests, wilderness areas, and other public lands have offensive names that celebrate people who have upheld slavery, committed unspeakable acts against Native Americans, or led Confederate war efforts. Furthermore, many of these landmarks include offensive slurs that degrade people based on their race or background, making many feel unwelcome.

Currently, the United States Board on Geographic Names oversees all naming processes and decisions. While Board policies authorize changing the names of offensive geographic features, the current process is time-consuming, lacks transparency and public involvement, and is ill equipped to address the vast nature of the problem. The Reconciliation in Place Names Act would create an Advisory Committee on Reconciliation in Place Names, which would make recommendations to the Board on Geographic Names on geographic features to be renamed and recommendations to Congress on renaming Federal land units with offensive names.

“Derogatory terms like ‘negro,’ ‘squaw,’ ‘Chinaman,’ and ‘Redskin,’ should not be included in the names of geographical places across the landscape of our nation.

These terms are harmful relics from the era of invidious yet lawful discrimination that must be removed from public property,” **Congressman Al Green said in a statement.** “This is why, in the 116th Congress, I was an original cosponsor of former Congresswoman Deb Haaland’s Reconciliation in Place Names Act, and why I have taken up that legislation as the lead sponsor in the 117th Congress with now-Secretary Haaland’s blessing.”

Congressman Green added, “This legislation, which is being simultaneously introduced in the Senate by Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.), will create a process to review and revise offensive names of Federal land units across our country. I have been an outspoken proponent of reconciliation for the vestiges of our nation’s seminal sin – slavery. Racism, even in geography, cannot be tolerated in a country that strives for liberty and justice for all. We must pass and enact the Reconciliation in Place Names Act. I thank Senator Warren for her partnership in introducing this legislation.”

“We need to immediately stop honoring the ugly legacy of racism and bigotry, and that’s why I’m introducing the Reconciliation in Place Names Act with my colleagues,” **Senator Warren said.** “This is about ending egregious expressions of systemic racism and bigotry, and taking a step toward dismantling white supremacy in our economy and society. It’s about building an America that lives up to its highest ideals.”

In 2015, 1,441 federally recognized places were identified as having questionable names. These places range from national forests, streams, and wilderness areas to features within the built environment such as bridges and monuments.

Although these sites are for the public regardless of identity, their names often reflect bigoted intentions that do not represent American values and hardly make all visitors feel welcome.

The Reconciliation in Place Names Act would specifically:

- Create an advisory board composed of individuals with backgrounds in civil rights and race relations, Tribal citizens, and organizations to bring a depth of knowledge and experience to the process.
- Solicit proposals from tribal nations, state and local governments, and

members of the public, and would provide an opportunity for the public to comment on name change proposals.

- Require the advisory board to make recommendations to the Board on Geographic Names on geographic features to be renamed and to Congress on renaming Federal land units with offensive names.

The Reconciliation in Place Names Act is cosponsored by 25 members of the House of Representatives, including Representatives Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.), Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC-At Large), Nanette Diaz Barragán (D-Calif.), Veronica Escobar (D-Texas), Adriano Espaillat (D-N.Y.), Darren Soto (D-Fla.), Dwight Evans (D-Pa.), Danny K. Davis (D-Ill.), Bennie G. Thompson (D-Miss.), Raúl M. Grijalva (D-Ariz.), Pramila Jayapal (D-Wash.), Ruben Gallego (D-Ariz.), Emmanuel Cleaver (D-Mo.), Andre Carson (D-Ind.) Grace Napolitano (D-Calif.), Cori Bush (D-Mo.), Karen Bass (D-Calif.), Rashida Tlaib (D-Mich.), Ted W. Lieu (D-Calif.), Mark Pocan (D-Wis.), David Cicilline (D-R.I.), Nikema Williams (D-Ga.), Kaiiali‘i Kahele (D-Hawaii), Barbara Lee (D-Calif.), and Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.). In the Senate, the bill is also being introduced by Senators Cory Booker (D-N.J.), Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.), and Alex Padilla (D-Calif.), along with Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.), Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), and Tina Smith (D-Minn.).

The Reconciliation in Place Names Act is endorsed by the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), The Wilderness Society, Hispanic Access Foundation, NativeOutdoors, Defenders of Wildlife, The Geological Society of America, The American Geophysical Union (AGU), American Association of Geographers, New Mexico Asian Family Center, Earthjustice, Together for Brothers, Advance Native Political Leadership, Friends of the Earth., U.S., Fernandéño Tataviam Band of Mission Indians, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Outdoor Afro, Native American Rights Fund, Gila Resources Information Project, Catholic Charities, Center for Civic Policy, Friends of Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks, New Mexico Thrives, Together for Brothers, New Mexico Voices for Children, Equality New Mexico, WildEarth Guardians, Center for Native American Youth at the Aspen Institute, and American Indian Science and Engineering Society.

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