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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Custer Falls Again**

### **Anishinaabek Caucus Joins Good Trouble Monroe**

**Monroe, Michigan, 2021 June 26**— The Anishinaabek Caucus joined Good Trouble Monroe to protest the continued presence of the Custer's statue in downtown Monroe. Julie Dye, Elder of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi read the land acknowledgement, a formal recognition of Indigenous People's contribution, whose practice of opening public meetings with a land acknowledgment is growing.

*The State of Michigan occupies the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary lands of the Anishinaabek – Three Fires Confederacy, the Odawa (Ottawa), Ojibwe (Chippewa), and Bodewadmi (Potawatomi). The Michigan Democratic Party recognizes historic Indigenous communities in Michigan and those forcibly removed from their homelands. We further recognize the ongoing relationship of dependence upon, and respect for, all living beings of earth, sky, and water. In offering this land acknowledgment, we affirm Indigenous sovereignty, history, and experiences.*

The statue stands upon Potawatomi lands, and Tribal Citizens outlined the crimes Custer committed: ten years of torture, abuse and genocide of the Native American people starting in 1866. Local citizens summarized the year-long process that has so far resulted in the city's agreement to engage a consultant to study the question of whether the statute should stay, or reside elsewhere.

Numerous testimonials, attesting to the heinous acts committed by Custer and to the feelings of constituents about Custer's glorification have poured in to the Monroe City Council through letters and public comments during city council meetings throughout the past year. The support comes from Michiganders of every ethnic background. Owen Gosling, of Cheboygan, Michigan, wrote.

*I speak as a white person whose family has a personal connection to General Custer and the Battle of Little Bighorn. My ancestor, Adolph Goslin, immigrated from Prussia to the United States after the Civil War, and entered into service with the US Army as a surveyor in the prairies. After Custer's defeat on the battlefield, my ancestor's regiment was the one sent to recover the bodies of the fallen US servicemen. We are not proud of our connection to George Custer. Custer represents the worst elements of our country and our shameful treatment of Indigenous Americans. Although we cannot change history, we can change the lessons that we draw from that history and we can begin the work of repair. I urge that you remove the statue, so we can send a clear signal that his life and behavior is not worthy of either celebration or emulation.*

Katybeth Davis, founder of Good Trouble Monroe recognized the status of most citizens as immigrants and as such must recognize standing indigenous people have. Moreover, Katybeth pointed out that there have been 10 previous rallies around the Custer statue to draw attention to the hate and divisiveness that this figure causes. This one, on the 145<sup>th</sup> year after Custer's defeat at Little Bighorn, aims to have Custer fall again.

Nat Spurr, Tribal Citizen of the Nottawaseppi Huron Band of Potawatomi expressed frustration with how long this statue has had its place in downtown Monroe.

*... these people, they don't identify with our ways. They don't respect our traditions. They don't respect our culture or we wouldn't have a monument dedicated to George Armstrong Custer right in the middle of Monroe, at the corner of Elm and Monroe Street since 1910. The guy died 145 years ago today at the Battle of Little Bighorn. This statue was dedicated by William Howard Taft, the U.S. president in 1910. So it's been here the past 111 years, 35 years after his death. It's totally irresponsible on the part of, you know, the state, the city of Monroe, the county of Monroe, and there's no excuse for it. It just needs to go.*

Chris Franklin, Oneida of the Thames 1<sup>st</sup> Nations, Bear Clan and United States Coast Guard Veteran from 1964 to 1968 when he was honorably discharged shared about General Custer from the viewpoint of a Veteran.

*General Custer is not fit to walk amongst the men and women of this country's military. There was no integrity or courage or anything redeemable in his military performance. It is not heroic to ride into a defenseless village and murder and mutilate women and children and elderly. These are the actions of a coward. As I mentioned, this is disrespectful to all veterans and active duty personnel to honor this person, who in this day and time, would be charged with war crimes. Tried, convicted, and dishonorably discharged and possibly face execution for the war crimes he committed. Enough is enough of false heroes. We do not build monuments to war criminals.*

Jerry Fisher, Oneida of the Thames 1<sup>st</sup> Nations and on the Board of Directors of the North American Indian Association of Detroit

*We need to change the narrative. You know, the narrative has been that 'history belongs to the victors.' We need to change it to 'history belongs to the survivors.'*

Traditional Anishinaabek song and dance were a part of the program. Nottawaseppi Boys, Doreece Manoka, Devon Harris, Kevin Harris Jr., and Charles Pfeifer, members of the Nottawaseppi Huron Band of Potawatomi, sang and drummed. Jefferson Ballew IV danced in regalia of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi.

The United Tribes of Michigan (UTM) unanimously voted to support the removal of the George Armstrong Custer monument. Through a resolution, the United Tribes of Michigan pronounced, "UTM accepts the mission to engage, as a matter of mutual concern, issues that impact the health, security, safety, and general welfare of Native Americans; and African American, Native American, and allied residents of the City of Monroe have issued a clear call to remove this monument as expeditiously as possible due to the harm it poses therefore be it resolved that the United Tribes of Michigan calls for immediate city action to remove the Custer monument from downtown Monroe.

Garnering attention nationwide, more than 14,000 thousand people have signed a petition for removal or relocation of the Custer statue. Graham Denton, an organizer for the Custer Relocation Project for Good Trouble Monroe asked, "When in US History is it okay for US soldiers to attack citizens who have

surrendered to the US govt and are living on land that the US govt designated for them on legally defined land?

Numerous voices from the audience spoke of the same injury done centuries ago. Yet it is continually replayed: Native American heritage is made invisible, and there is a push to separate the Indigenous from their own lands.

Redbird, Cherokee, in 1962 moved from Monroe in protest when taxpayer money was to fund the Custer statue's move from a corner in downtown Monroe to its current location in Saint Mary's Park.

Jeffrey Taite, Cherokee, attended school in Monroe and recalls memories of bullying because of his melanization. A row of gym lockers were pushed onto his younger brother as a triumph by bullies who had no idea that Jeffrey's family was Native American. Erasure of Native Americans as a people is ongoing.

Tasha Green, 2022 candidate for Mayor in Westland, summed up the spirit of the rally, "What happens to your family, happens to my family.

Wilson Irizarry-Omega, Taino-Arawak, brought his wife and daughter to deepen their understanding of social recognition and value for multinational cultures.

Advocacy to remove the Custer statue has received community support and solidarity from fourteen organizations.

Anishinaabek Caucus of the Michigan Democratic Party  
Arcus Center for Social Justice Leadership (ARCUS)  
Cass County Michigan Democratic Party  
Center for Change - A Northern Michigan Advocacy group  
Coalition of Natives and Allies  
Concerned Citizens of Monroe County and Allies  
Eliminating Racism and Creating/Celebrating Equity  
Idle No More Michigan  
Michigan Coalition Against Racism in Sports & Media  
Monroe County Positive Action Network  
Native American Student Community Organization Movement (NASCO)  
Native Justice Coalition  
Turtle Island Dreamkeepers  
United Tribes of Michigan

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photographs: at Custer Statute w drummers & Dancers; Julie Dye sells tshirt to Kellyann Navarre; Julie Dye with sign; Wilson Irizarry-Omega & daughter Savannah Butram; Nottawseppi Boys & Jefferson Ballew IV; R.J. Fiest at Custer Statue with American Indian Movement (AIM) flag