



----STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA----
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

KRISTI NOEM | GOVERNOR

July 29, 2020

Hon. David Bernhardt
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20240

Dear Secretary Bernhardt:

I was very pleased to receive your letter of July 21, 2020 relating to the National Garden of American Heroes.

The Black Hills of South Dakota are a perfect location for this garden and South Dakota is ready to work with the President and with your task force to make the National Garden a reality. In this letter I will briefly address your three questions.

Locations of natural beauty

The Black Hills is one of the most beautiful settings in the country, and ever since Calvin Coolidge made it his "summer White House" in 1927, visitors from around the world have come to enjoy the Hills. Located near the geographic center of the fifty states, the Black Hills welcome millions of visitors every year who travel by car or fly into the airport in the population center of Rapid City.

The National Garden seeks to honor American heroes through sculpture in a setting of natural beauty. That is not a new idea in South Dakota, where Mount Rushmore stands as a monument to four of our greatest presidents. Nearby, the Crazy Horse Memorial, an even more ambitious mountain carving in progress, honors one of the great Lakota leaders.

I would propose that the National Garden be built at Mount Rushmore National Memorial as an expansion of the Memorial site. It was at Mount Rushmore that President Trump announced his plans for the National Garden, and additional sculptures that honor American heroes would be a fitting extension to our "Shrine to Democracy."

Statues could easily be added to existing trails, and the federal lands already within the monument footprint would allow for additional development of trails and gardens. The

monument already has visitor services such as a restaurant, gift shop, and parking, and expansion could even lead to the construction of a 24/7 lodge, which has been discussed in concept for some time. Work is also in progress to complete a biking and hiking trail that will connect Mount Rushmore to the world-class Mickelson Trail.

If the preference is for a site separate from Mount Rushmore, there are numerous sites in the Black Hills that could easily be developed for this purpose. Much of the Black Hills is federally owned, as part of the Black Hills National Forest, Mount Rushmore National Memorial, Wind Cave National Park, or Jewel Cave National Monument. Custer State Park, another large area, is state-owned. I am also aware of two excellent locations that are currently in private hands but that may be available: one near the highway connecting Rapid City to Mount Rushmore, and the other near Mount Rushmore on the historic Iron Mountain Road. I'd be happy to share more details about these properties if you are interested.

Available statues or monuments

South Dakota recently completed an inventory of statuary in the state, which can be viewed here: [\(link\)](#). Our state has a thriving and dynamic arts community and, relying on talented in-state sculptors, we have added many statues in the last twenty years. Most notably, Rapid City's "City of Presidents" has erected life-size bronze statues of every former U.S. President in the city's downtown area. In the capital city of Pierre, a similar project is erecting statues of every former South Dakota governor.

I am confident these organizations would be amenable to a short-term loan of statues to the National Garden. In the longer term, our South Dakota sculptors would be excellent candidates to produce new works for the Garden.

American heroes

There are, of course, many American heroes who would be fitting additions to the President's initial list. I would propose a few South Dakotans who should be strongly considered:

- **Joe Foss** - World War II naval aviator and Congressional Medal of Honor recipient; 20th Governor of South Dakota; first commissioner of the American Football League; president of the National Rifle Association.
- **George McGovern** - recipient of the Distinguished Flying Cross during World War II; Represented South Dakota in the U.S. House 1957-61 and U.S. Senate 1963-81; Democratic nominee for President in 1972; Partnered with former U.S. Senator Bob Dole to combat world hunger and malnourishment.
- **Sitting Bull** - a great Lakota Sioux chief who led the Lakota tribes against General Custer and the U.S. Army at the Battle of the Little Bighorn; killed in 1889 when Indian agents attempts to arrest him due to his advocacy on behalf of his people.
- **Laura Ingalls Wilder**- a beloved children's author whose *Little House* books define the pioneer spirit that settled the American West. Several states can claim Laura, but of her nine *Little House* books, five of them take place near De Smet, South Dakota.

- **Ernest O. Lawrence** - winner of the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1939 for his invention of the cyclotron, a particle accelerator used in nuclear physics; participant in the Manhattan Project and witness to the detonation of the first atomic bomb; founder of Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory; namesake of lawrencium, a synthetic chemical element with the atomic number 103.
- **Peter Norbeck**- 9th Governor of South Dakota and U.S. Senator; conservation advocate who led the creation of Custer State Park, Mount Rushmore National Monument, Badlands National Monument, and Grand Teton National Park, held the state's first pheasant hunting season, and sponsored the Migratory Bird Conservation Act.

The Black Hills of South Dakota are a place of exceptional natural beauty in the center of America, and millions of visitors already come to the Black Hills every year. We have a long history of honoring great Americans in sculpture, and a thriving arts community that can contribute to this project.

Our state stands at the ready to work with President Trump and your task force to bring the National Garden to South Dakota. Please contact my chief of staff, Tony Venhuizen, at tony.venhuizen@state.sd.us, if you have any questions or require more information. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Kristi Noem
Governor