



**COALITION OF LARGE TRIBES**

Blackfeet Nation • Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe • Crow Nation • Eastern Shoshone Tribe  
Fort Belknap Indian Community • Mandan, Hidatsa & Arikara Nation • Navajo Nation • Northern Arapaho Tribe  
Oglala Sioux Tribe • Rosebud Sioux Tribe • Shoshone-Paiute Tribes of the Duck Valley Indian Reservation  
Shoshone Bannock Tribes • Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate • Spokane Tribe • Ute Indian Tribe

January 4, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg, Secretary  
The Honorable Arlando Teller, Assistant Secretary for Tribal Government Affairs  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Ave. SE  
Washington, D.C. 20590

The Honorable Bill Nelson  
Administrator  
National Aeronautics and Space  
Administration  
300 E St SW  
Washington, DC 20024

**Re: Urgent Request for Delayed Launch January 8, 2024 or Payload Removal Pending Tribal Consultation**

Dear Secretary Buttigieg, Assistant Secretary Teller, and Administrator Nelson:

I am writing this letter on behalf of the Coalition of Large Tribes<sup>1</sup> in support of the Navajo Nation's letter dated December 21, 2023, in which the Navajo Nation expressed [profound concern](#) regarding information that a vehicle carrying cremated human remains is set to launch on January 8, 2024 with a mission of depositing remains on the moon. We understand the Department of Transportation has issued permits to allow for this activity and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has entered a contract supporting the operation. These permits were issued and this mission scheduled without tribal consultation and should be cancelled or at least postponed unless and until such consultation occurs.

As the Navajo Nation explained, NASA in 1998 attempted to do the same thing, and after being contacted by the Navajo Nation and confronted with the spiritual and cultural harm the deposit of remains on the moon would cause Navajo people, apologized, and promised tribal consultation would occur prior to consideration of any new mission to place human remains on the moon. Is it NASA's intent to once again break the promises made to the indigenous people of the United States? Launching this mission with the human remains payload and without tribal consultation would be in direct violation of President Biden's January 26, 2021 Presidential Memorandum on

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<sup>1</sup> COLT is an inter-tribal advocacy organization that represents the interests of the more than 50 tribes with reservations of 100,000 acres or more, including the Navajo Nation. COLT's Member Tribes hold more than 95% of Indian lands in the United States and encompass approximately one half of the country's Native American population.



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Tribal Consultation and Strengthening Nation-to-Nation Relationships, which reaffirmed President Obama's Presidential Memorandum of November 5, 2009 (Tribal Consultation), which in turn reaffirmed President Clinton's Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments (Nov. 6, 2000).

As there has been no tribal consultation on the matter, *the Coalition of Large Tribes demands that the launch either be delayed or that the cremated remains be removed from the payload until there has been appropriate tribal consultation.*

Celestial bodies play an important role in our ceremonial life and cultural heritage for most, if not all Tribes in the United States. NASA has acknowledged this and on its own website stated: "The Indigenous Peoples Initiative focuses on building relationships across NASA and Indigenous communities through place-based remote sensing training, community engagement, and co-production of knowledge", and yet ignores its own commitment. (<https://appliedsciences.nasa.gov/indigenous-peoples-initiative>). On today's White House Intergovernmental Affairs call, Deputy Assistant to the President and Executive Secretary for the National Space Council Chirag Parikh announced that Department of the Interior Secretary Deb Haaland had been named to the Space Council. This belated inclusion of a Native voice on the Space Council is welcome and we urge her to support the Navajo Nation's and COLT's request for tribal consultation regarding any placement of human remains on the moon.

Government-to-government consultation with tribal nations must occur on matters that affect tribal interests such as protecting our sacred places, including celestial bodies. As I have stated on several occasions, "**tribal consultation must be respected even when it is inconvenient.**"

I look forward to your prompt action on this matter. Should you or your staff have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact COLT Executive Director OJ Semans at (605) 828-1422 or [tateota@hotmail.com](mailto:tateota@hotmail.com) or Justin C. Ahasteen, Executive Director of the Navajo Nation's Washington Office at (202) 682-7390 or by email at [jahasteen@nwo.org](mailto:jahasteen@nwo.org). Thank you for your time and attention.

Respectfully,

Hon. Marvin Weatherwax  
Chairman, Coalition of Large Tribe  
Member, Blackfeet Tribal Business Council