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Mr. Trent Palmer
U.S. BGN Executive Secretary, Domestic Names
US Board of Geographic Names
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February 28, 2023

Dear Mr. Palmer,

On behalf of the State of Colorado, I'm writing to communicate my recommendations concerning two matters pending before the United States Board of Geographic Names (USBGN): renaming Mount Evans, located in Clear Creek County; and renaming Negro Creek and Negro Mesa in Delta County.

Attached are the full summaries from the Colorado Geographic Naming Advisory Board (CGNAB).

The process leading to, and resulting in the CGNAB's recommendation to rename Mount Evans to Mount Blue Sky was well developed including with a broad diversity of stakeholders, Tribal consultation, local government buy-in and leadership, and significant public input, including feedback from living descendents of then Territorial Governor John Evans. Local buy-in and leadership is a critical element in this process and both the Mt. Evans proposal and the proposal to rename Negro Creek have this element strongly in common. With specific respect to the renaming of Mt. Evans, it is worth underscoring the long-time and early expressed desire for the renaming from Clear Creek County itself, drawing upon their own extensive consideration process, as well as the support of Jefferson County and the City of Denver Parks Department which operates recreational activities at the mountain.

After decades of examination with respect to his role and exhaustive reports by both the University of Denver and Northwestern University, then Territorial Governor John Evans' culpability tacit or explicit for the Sand Creek Massacre is without question. In August of 2021, I formally rescinded the bigoted, inhumane, and legally questionable proclamations made by then Territorial Governor Evans that led to the Sand Creek Massacre, the deadliest day in Colorado history.

Simply put, Governor Evans didn't just engage in warfare against Native Americans, but facilitated the senseless slaughter of non-combatants including large numbers of women, children, and the elderly by his proclamation and acknowledged initiative to fully eliminate eastern Colorado of any Native American presence and actions further empowering Colonel John Chivington. This initiative of Governor Evans led to the authorization of the 3rd Colorado Cavalry Regiment with the stated purpose of making war on native peoples, and provided false security to native peoples with the intent instead of increasing territorial control. Without the 3rd Regiment, John Chivington could not have led the brutal attack at Sand Creek over the protest of several officers who knew the encampment of Cheyenne and Arapaho were peaceful. By the end of the attack, hundreds of Cheyenne and Arapaho men, women, and children were mutilated and killed. Colonel Chivington celebrated in Denver, parading the deceased bodies through the streets while Governor Evans praised and decorated Chivington and his men for their "valor in subduing the savages." Subsequent military and congressional investigations, spurred by the brave accounts of several of Chivington's men who objected to the masacre, further illuminated Evans' role in the event including efforts to cover it up, and led to his forced resignation. Numerous other contemporary examinations of the atrocity and Evans' role have further underscored his culpability.

That's not to say that Colorado in any way is erasing the complicated history of Territorial Governor John Evans. His role, including as a founder of both the University of Denver and Northwestern University, his role in bringing the railroad to Denver forever changing the course of the city and the state, his impact on the medical profession, and his opposition to slavery and close relationship to Abraham Lincoln in his early life in Illinois are an important part of our history. However, as History Colorado has noted, he had a glaring blind-spot for the rights and even the very humanity of Native Americans. This complicated history will continue to be studied, taught and debated in academia, our research and historical institutions and classrooms, and his name will undoubtedly continue to appear in many places inside and outside of our state.

However, we only have 54 iconic "fourteeners" in our state, and each one deserves a name befitting their majesty. While we all grew up knowing the iconic Mount Evans, it is clear that Coloradans want a name that unites us rather than divides us and that we can all be proud of. Such a controversial, and for many painful, name for one of Colorado's most famous "14ers" only diminishes its stately presence and breathtaking beauty.

We need a name that pays homage to the beauty that is this great mountain. The broadly recommended name, Mount Blue Sky, pays direct homage to the Cheyenne and Arapaho peoples and to our frequent sunny weather and blue skies. As such, I concur with Clear Creek County and the board's recommendation that the USBGN rename Mount Evans to Mount Blue Sky.

In regards to the CGNAB's recommendation to rename Negro Creek and Negro Mesa, it goes without question that these antiquated and offensive place-names must be changed. I applaud and endorse Delta County's initiative in removing the derogatory terms from usage in reference to those geographic features - beginning before the Colorado naming board was even reconstituted. I thank Delta County for their efforts to further enlist the students of Cedaredge High School and the broader community to successfully come up with a name: Clay Creek and Clay Mesa. Their work engaged the community in the worthwhile exercise of changing these derogatory names. For new names to be accepted and used, local buy-in and participation is essential. I applaud the efforts of Delta County, students, and the broader community in their efforts. It is my recommendation that Negro Creek and Negro Mesa be renamed Clay Creek and Clay Mesa, respectively, consistent with the good work and inclusive exercise of Delta County and the students of Cedaredge High School.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and your support in renaming geographic features reflective of the values of Coloradans.

Sincerely,

Jared Polis
Governor