



PETITION TO RENAME MOUNT EVANS

John Evans is Not Worthy of Recognition

“ I, John Evans, governor of Colorado Territory, do issue this my proclamation, authorizing all citizens of Colorado, either individually or in such parties as they may organize, to go in pursuit of all hostile Indians on the plains...to kill and destroy, as enemies of the country, wherever they may be found, all such hostile Indians.”

—1864 Proclamation by Governor Evans

SUMMARY

Mount Evans is a stunningly beautiful Colorado landmark that deserves a name that honors its natural and cultural history. The mountain is named in honor of John Evans, the former territorial governor of Colorado who authorized the indiscriminate murder of American Indians and was responsible for one of the worst massacres in American history, the sand Creek Massacre. The Sand Creek Massacre resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Cheyenne and Arapaho men, women, and children. Evans was roundly condemned, forced to resign in disgrace, and is not deserving of recognition. This petition is submitted by the Cheyenne & Arapaho Tribes and The Wilderness Society. We propose to rename Mt. Evans as Mt. Blue Sky as it signifies the Arapaho as they were known as the Blue Sky People and the Cheyenne who have an annual ceremony of renewal of life called Blue Sky.

BACKGROUND

Stunning and rugged, and standing at 14,264 feet in elevation, Mount Evans towers over Colorado’s Front Range and dominates the Denver skyline. Mount Evans is an incredible Colorado landmark that features important pieces of the state’s history. The mountain deserves a name that honors its natural and cultural values, rather than its current name which recognizes John Evans, the former politician who authorized the indiscriminate murder of American Indians and was responsible for one of the worst massacres in American history.

John Evans was the territorial governor of Colorado from 1862 to 1865. As territorial governor, Evans supported raids and warfare against American Indians. In June 1864, Evans issued a proclamation to “Friendly Indians of the Plains” ordering them to report to “places of

safety.”¹ “The war on hostile Indians will be continued,” the proclamation warned, “until they are all effectively subdued.”² Many Native Americans who tried to peacefully surrender were killed.

Less than two months later, Evans issued a second proclamation authorizing “all citizens of Colorado...to go in pursuit of all hostile Indians and “kill and destroy” them. The proclamation reads, in part:

I, John Evans, governor of Colorado Territory, do issue this my proclamation, all citizens of Colorado, either individually or in such parties as they may organize, to go in pursuit of all hostile Indians on the plains...to kill and destroy, as enemies of the country, wherever they may be found, all such hostile Indians. And further...I hereby empower such citizens, or parties of citizens, to take captive, and hold to their own private use and benefit, all the property of said hostile Indians that they may capture...³

The proclamation went on to offer to provide arms and ammunition and pay soldier’s wages to any citizens who report for war against Native Americans.

At the same time Evans was declaring war against Native Americans and organizing local militias to carry it out, Colonel John Chivington, commander of the Colorado Military District declared martial law, which usurped Evans’ vigilante forces into an organized militia. Chivington then turned that militia against the Native Americans of the plains. The results were disastrous.

The militia found hundreds of peaceful Cheyenne and Arapaho camped at Big Sandy Creek. The Native Americans had moved to the Big Sandy after reporting to Ft. Lyons—as ordered by Governor Evans’ first proclamation—and being ordered by the military commander there to do so. Upon seeing the army amassing above their camp, Cheyenne leader Mo’ohtavetoo’o (Black Kettle) raised an American flag and a white flag to signal their peaceful intentions. Despite this, Chivington directed the force to attack.

Hundreds of Cheyenne and Arapaho men, women, and children were mutilated and killed. One soldier later recounted the scene before Congress: “I saw the bodies of those lying there cut all to pieces, worse mutilated than any I ever saw before; the women cut all to pieces...[cut] with knives; scalped; their brains knocked out; children two or three months old; all ages lying there, from sucking infants up to warriors...[mutilated] by the United States troops.”⁴ Many similar accounts exist, each portraying the most vicious and inhumane treatment imaginable.

¹ Report of the John Evans Study Committee, University of Denver, November 2014, p. 60.

² *Id.*, at 60.

³ *Id.* at 67.

⁴ Testimony of John Smith, March 14, 1865. Available at <https://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/resources/archives/four/sandcrk.htm#smith>.

Chivington celebrated by parading the mutilated bodies of tribal members in the streets of Denver. Governor Evans praised the men for their “valor in subduing the savages.”⁵

The event was soon recognized as a brutal massacre. Two Congressional committees and one military committee investigated the event, recognizing guilt on the part of the United States. The Joint Committee on the Conduct of War wrote of Colonel Chivington that they could “hardly find fitting terms to describe his conduct.”⁶ “Chivington,” the committee wrote, “deliberately planned and executed a foul and dastardly massacre...to gratify the worst passions that ever cursed the heart of man.”⁷

Evans testified before the committees and proclaimed his innocence. Nonetheless, he was accused of creating the conditions upon which the Sand Creek Massacre took place and of covering up his involvement in the attack. The Joint Committee on the Conduct of War said, in its final report, that “no effort seems to have been made by the authorities there to prevent these hostilities, other than by the commission of even worse acts. The hatred of the whites to the Indians would seem to have been inflamed and excited to the utmost.”⁸ It was John Evans who created these conditions.

The Chairman of the Joint Commission demanded that Governor Evans be removed from office. In 1865, Governor Evans was forced to resign in disgrace.

That same year, the United States negotiated the Treaty of the Little Arkansas River, in part to compensate victims of the Sand Creek Massacre. The treaty stated:

The United States being desirous to express its condemnation of, and, as far as may be, repudiate the gross and wanton outrages perpetrated against certain bands of Cheyenne and Arrapahoe Indians, on the twenty-ninth day of November, A.D. 1864, at Sand Creek, in Colorado Territory, while the said Indians were at peace with the United States, and under its flag, whose protection they had by lawful authority been promised and induced to seek, and the Government being desirous to make some suitable reparation for the injuries then done, will grant 320 acres of land by patent.⁹

The treaty also promised individual payments to survivors. The promised payments have never been made.

⁵ Leavitt, Craig; Noel, Thomas J. Herndon Davis: *Painting Colorado History, 1901–1962* (2016). University Press of Colorado. p. 57.

⁶ John Chivington Biography, National Park Service. Available at <https://www.nps.gov/sand/learn/historyculture/john-chivington-biography.htm>.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ University of Denver report, p. 83.

⁹ Sand Creek Massacre, *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains*. Available at <http://plainshumanities.unl.edu/encyclopedia/doc/egp.war.039>.

A final, 2014 report by the University of Denver confirmed Evans' responsibility for the Sand Creek Massacre, concluding "John Evans's pattern of neglect of his treaty-negotiating duties, his leadership failures, and his reckless decision-making in 1864 combine to clearly demonstrate a significant level of culpability for the Sand Creek Massacre."¹⁰

PROPOSED NAME

It's time to rename Mount Evans. There is no place to honor those who facilitated atrocities against Native Americans on America's public lands. We propose to rename Mt. Evans as Mt. Blue Sky as it signifies the Arapaho as they were known as the Blue Sky People and the Cheyenne who have an annual ceremony of renewal of life called Blue Sky.

SUPPORT FOR THE NAME CHANGE

There is wide support for changing the name of Mt. Evans. In addition to the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes and The Wilderness Society, the name change is supported by numerous tribal leaders, conservation organizations, local government officials, and others.

In 2018, the Denver American Indian Commission wrote in support of changing the name of Mt. Evans:

It's time to discontinue using Evans' name because we do not honor mass killing of human life for any reason. Colorado's interest in promoting inclusivity is stronger than any prior interest in honoring a man who is known for politically targeting Tribes (Utes, Cheyenne, Arapaho and Lakota) with messages of hate and fear, of which directly resulted in a massacre of over 160 people, including mostly women and children.¹¹

Evans' great-great grandson, Tom Hayden, also supported changing the name of Mt. Evans, as did his wife and sister.¹²

PETITIONERS

This petition is submitted by the Cheyenne & Arapaho Tribes and The Wilderness Society on behalf of all people who seek a more just and equitable name for Mt. Evans.

¹⁰ University of Denver report, p. iii.

¹¹ Statement supporting Mt. Evans name change process, Denver American Indian Commission, December 10, 2018.

¹² Only great-Great grandson of former Governor John Evans dies 9 months after apologizing for Sand Creek Massacre, KGNU, March 9, 2015.