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January 28, 2025

Senator Lisa Murkowski
United States Senate
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Murkowski:

The Alaska Historical Society, Alaska's principal statewide organization dedicated to the promotion and understanding of Alaska history, requests that you promptly introduce legislation to overturn President Trump's executive order renaming Alaska's tallest mountain, returning the traditional name favored by Alaska Native peoples and most Alaskans – Denali.

Alaska Natives, primarily the five Athabascan groups that historically lived around Denali, have long used names to describe North America's tallest mountain, all which reference "the great mountain," "the tall one" or "mountain-big." Early European explorers echoed that sentiment. In 1975, the State of Alaska formally requested Mount McKinley be renamed Denali, but the U.S. Board on Geographic Names failed to act, stymied by political pressure from McKinley's home state of Ohio. In 2015, an order by the Secretary of the Interior changed the official name of the mountain to Denali.

The name of America's 25th president, William McKinley, was attached to the mountain by a gold prospector passing through the region in 1896. Historians have come to judge McKinley as an imperialist who viewed colonized populations as inferior and incapable of self-government. McKinley exemplified characteristics Alaskans have long resisted: discrimination and ill-treatment of indigenous peoples, exploitation by distant colonialists, and manipulation of markets for personal gain. He never stepped foot in Alaska. Rather than being ashamed of the name affixed to our state's most prominent landmark, Alaskans want to be proud of the symbol of our state's majesty and the rich history it represents.

President Trump's political act has had the rare effect of uniting Alaskans. Our media is full of discussion of how to preserve the mountain's name Denali. The Alaska House of Representatives overwhelmingly voted this week to ask the president to reverse his action. Indications are that appears unlikely. Therefore, we urge you to stand up proudly for Alaska's history and pursue legislation to return Denali as the rightful name of Alaska's greatest natural landmark.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark blue ink that reads "David Ramseur". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

David Ramseur
President