



General Services Administration  
Office of the Administrator  
Mr. Stephen A. Perry  
1800 F Street, NW  
Washington , DC 20405

January 9, 2004

Dear Mr. Perry;

The Society of American Indian Government Employees (SAIGE) is a national organization representing the interests of American Indians and Alaska Natives employed by the Federal Government. We promote equal protection under the law for native employees as well as awareness of and sensitivity to American Indian and Alaska Native people and culture within the Federal government. We also strongly support and promote our respective agencies' efforts to respect and be responsive to the unique Federal relationship to Tribal governments and America's indigenous peoples.

For these reasons, we believe it is our responsibility to address an issue that is in opposition to these goals.

As you are aware, there are murals housed in the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) offices in the Ariel Rios Building in Washington D.C. that are extremely offensive, especially to American Indian people. Because many American Indian employees work in this building, the presence of these murals creates a hostile work place. Further, they offend the American Indian Tribal officials and others who regularly conduct business within the building.

We understand that the GSA 's position is that the murals are historic in that they are representative of the 1930's era Works Progress Administration and must remain in place in order to be protected. We maintain that their presence creates a hostile work environment and outweighs arguments for keeping them in their present location.

Additionally:

- The murals are not physically a part of the building's architecture and can be removed, hence, their removal would not affect the building's architectural historic status.
- They are not reflective either of our national history or of any historic incident.
- The murals are historically inaccurate and misrepresent the history of American Indian people and denigrate our many contributions to this great Country, our homeland.

If it is necessary to preserve these murals, we recommend that they be placed in a museum collection where they may be seen voluntarily by those wishing to do so and interpreted within that context. We believe that the GSA understands not only the value of the health and well-being of Federal staff, but the importance of compliance with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 concerning hostile work environments.

We realize that the EPA has attempted to resolve this issue with the GSA, and we applaud those efforts, but find the outcome unsatisfactory. It is within GSA's authority to remove these highly offensive murals permanently. SAIGE urges you to act immediately to do so. No ethnic group should be treated in this disrespectful, off-handed manner. Likewise, no Federal workers should be subjected to a hostile work environment. We remind you that this type of defamatory imagery is not appropriate in any government office building, because it upholds the institutionalization and advances the perpetuation of the harmful stereotypes depicted in the mural.

"We The People" is a phrase often used to characterize our government. We continue to be a government of, by, and for the people; therefore, we ask you to honor ALL of the people of this great nation, including those who were first on these lands.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Lori Windle  
Chairwoman  
For the Board of Directors  
Society of American Indian Government Employees  
309 Wimbeldon Court  
Stafford, VA 22556

Footnote:

*"Dangers of the Mail" itself has a history of offending-not because of its portrayal of natives, but because of its nudity, according to a 1937 Washington Post article. "Gasping employees" rushed to see it, some "admired" it, others "were offended." Time magazine ran a picture of the mural and readers protested the use of their tax dollars for salacious art. And even back then, Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes expressed concern that the portrayal of the Indians might not be accurate. - Washington Post, 11/20/00*