

My friends, we come together today to worship in the greatest temple of all, Nature herself. May we forever hold her sacred! We have seen many assaults upon our sacred places in the last seven years, from drilling for oil in the Arctic, to clear-cuts being allowed in our ancient forests, and the continuing reductions in funding for our National Parks. As the followers of nature-based religions, I feel that it is our religious responsibility to see that this is changed!

In fairness thought, it has not been all losses. Last week I was out camping by a lake in central New York, and had the privilege to watch a bald eagle slowly fly along the shoreline, and then dive in to catch a fish. The eagles have finally come back to the point where they were taken off the endangered species list this past week. Another large plus, is that today most people in the United States believe that global warming is a real threat and are willing to work to stop it. There may still be time to accomplish this, before life, as we know it, is gone for good!

Although I could talk about environmental issues all day, that is not the reason I am here today. I am here to talk about a quest that the Druid groups in the United States have been working on. This quest is to have the Druids' Awen symbol recognized as a symbol that can be used on the headstones of our deceased veterans. I stand before you and hold in my hand copies of letters to the Veteran's Administration from the largest Druid organizations in the United States. They **ALL** ask that the Awen symbol be allowed on deceased veteran's headstones.

Before I tell you more of this quest, I would like to give my personal thanks to the leaders of those Druid organizations for their aid. First, for spearheading this cause, I would like to thank Ellen Hopman from the Order of the White Oak. Her tireless efforts have been an inspiration to us all. I also want to thank Michael Scharding, from the Reformed Druids of North America (the RDNA), Tony Taylor, from the Henge of Keltria, and John Michael Greer from the Ancient Order of Druids in America (the AODA).

The quest to have the Druid's Awen symbol approved began in 2004. After learning about the struggle to get the pentacle approved on veteran's headstones, Ellen Hopman and Craig Mellia, the current co-chiefs of the Order of the White Oak, polled the members of their organization to determine which symbol should be used to represent the Druids on headstones. There were many symbols proposed, clusters of oak leaves, oak leaves and acorns, individual oak leaves, and the Awen symbol. At the end, the tri-line Awen symbol was the favorite.

They then approached the other Druid organizations in the US to see if the Awen symbol was acceptable to them. After another lengthy process, with further symbols proposed, it was determined that the Awen symbol was the best choice. Near the end of 2004 and early in 2005, all the groups sent in letters to the Veteran's Administration. The replies we received told us that the Veteran's Administration was, to use their words, "in the process of revising and clarifying their policy, so our patience was requested." It seems like their "policy revising" went on for a long time! Then in mid-2006, while Selena Fox and others from Circle Sanctuary and the Lady Liberty League continued to strongly press for the Pentacle approval, the Druid groups **again** sent out letters to the Veteran's Administration. This time, we gave them all the information they required under their "new policy."

Today we still wait to hear the results of our requests. How much longer do we need to wait to have our symbol approved? I have with me copies of letters sent from three individual Druids to the Veteran's Administration, requesting that the Awen symbol be placed on **their** headstones. Do we have to wait until one of them dies before we can gain the recognition our symbol deserves? **I hope not!**

As I stand before you today, I vow to continue working until all religions are treated equally in the United States. On this day that celebrates our country gaining its freedom from the British, it is important to remember that one of the freedoms gained, the freedom of religion does **NOT** mean freedom just for the **ONE** majority religion. It means freedom for **ALL** religions to worship as they choose! **Be it always so!**