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Statement of

The National Association for Uniformed Services

on

H.R. 4298, the Vietnam Helicopter Crewmembers Memorial Act

submitted for consideration by

Rick Jones, Legislative Director
National Association for Uniformed Services

to the

Subcommittee on Military Personnel,
Committee on Armed Services

Thursday, Sept. 8, 2016
Rayburn House Office Building

Introduction

Chairman Heck, Ranking Member Davis and Members of the Subcommittee, the National Association for Uniformed Services thanks you for holding this hearing to discuss H.R. 4298 – the Vietnam Helicopter Crewmembers Memorial Act.

The National Association for Uniformed Services strongly supports favorable action on the Vietnam Helicopter Crewmembers Memorial Act. The legislation, introduced by Nevada Congressman Mark Amodei, would establish a memorial at Arlington National Cemetery to honor the collective valor of 5,000 Helicopter Pilots and Crewmembers who died during the War in Vietnam.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) H.R. 4298 – the Vietnam Helicopter Crewmembers Memorial Act

(Q) What is the justification for seeking a memorial within Arlington National Cemetery to honor helicopter pilots and crewmembers killed in the Vietnam War?

(A) No memorial exists that recognizes the common valor of the helicopter pilots and crewmembers of all military branches who gave the last full measure of devotion to their nation in the Vietnam War. No national monument specifically honors the pilots and crewmembers that died in rotary-wing aircraft, despite their significant contribution to what is commonly described as “The Helicopter War.”

(Q) Why does the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association and NAUS and many other veteran organizations, seek the placement of this monument within Arlington National Cemetery?

(A) Arlington National Cemetery is where the nation goes to honor those lost in war. Almost 5,000 pilots and crewmembers died during the long span of Vietnam combat (1963-1975), and Arlington National Cemetery (ANC) holds approximately 457 pilots and crewmembers from all service branches, Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force and Coast Guard, who perished in the conflict. In addition, recovered Missing in Action (MIA) crews lie buried together within the cemetery along with many combat helicopter pilots who earned the Medal of Honor and other distinguished awards. ANC is the heart of the United States Armed Forces, and remains the most fitting location for this honor to their joint service and sacrifice.

(Q) The Secretary of the Army declined the proposed memorial, but approved the placement of a small tree marker instead. Why is this unsatisfactory?

(A) Existing small tree markers generally honor the specific service of individual military units from a specific branch of the military such as a U.S. Army regiment or U.S. Navy ship, while others honor those who fought in specific battles. Small tree markers have *never* been used to honor the common sacrifice of thousands of servicemen, from different military branches serving jointly, who gave their lives across the span of 13 years of combat; honoring this extraordinary sacrifice with a small tree marker would diminish the magnitude of their sacrifice and valor.

(Q) Some feel the limited burial plots remaining within ANC justify restricting additional memorials that take away space for graves. Is this a good reason for declining the Vietnam Helicopter Pilot and Crewmember Memorial?

(A) No. Arlington National Cemetery possesses areas that are unsuitable for the placement of graves due to soil conditions, tree roots and underground utilities. The proposed Vietnam Helicopter Pilot and Crewmember Memorial will require only five square feet of ground, and could easily be placed on a spot within the cemetery unsuitable for burial.

(Q) Will taxpayer dollars be used to create and install the Vietnam Helicopter Pilot and Crewmember Memorial in Arlington National Cemetery?

(A) No. The design, production and installation will be fully paid for with private funds from the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association and its supporters.

(Q) Why do this now, some 40 years after the Vietnam War ended?

(A) Most United States military memorials are established between 20 and 50 years after the end of fighting. Surviving Vietnam Veterans are reaching the end of their natural lives and want to ensure those deserving of tribute are recognized before their generation disappears into history. At this time, during the 50th Commemoration of the Vietnam War, establishing the Vietnam Helicopter Pilot and Crewmember Memorial within Arlington National Cemetery is the right thing to do at the right time in history.

The National Association for Uniformed Services Appreciates the Opportunity to Submit a Statement in Support of H.R. 4298

The National Association for Uniformed Services thanks the Subcommittee on Military Personnel for its leadership and its commitment to core issues dealing with military personnel issues. And we thank you, Chairman Heck and Ranking Member Davis, for holding this hearing and allowing NAUS a chance to submit a statement in support of H.R. 4298 – the Vietnam Helicopter Crewmembers Memorial Act.

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Richard A. "Rick" Jones joined NAUS as Legislative Director on Sept. 1, 2005. As legislative director, Rick is the primary individual responsible for promoting the NAUS legislative goals before the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs and the Congress of the United States.

Rick presently serves as co-director of the National Military and Veterans Alliance (NMVA), a non-partisan policy and advocacy organization composed of military associations and veterans organizations. Rick also serves as co-chairman of the Alliance for Military and Overseas Voting Rights (AMOVR), an alliance formed to ensure that our military men and women are afforded their right to vote and to ensure their votes are counted.

Rick is an Army veteran who served as a medical specialist during the Vietnam War era. His assignments included duty at Brooke General Hospital in San Antonio, Texas; Fitzsimons General Hospital in Denver, Colorado; and Moncrief Community Hospital in Columbia, South Carolina.

Rick completed undergraduate work at Brown University prior to his Army draft and, following military service, used his G.I. Bill benefits to earn a Master Degree in Public Administration from East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina.

Prior to assuming his current position, Rick served as National Legislative Director for AMVETS, a major veterans service organization. He also worked nearly twenty years as a legislative staff aide in the offices of Senator Paul Coverdell, Senator Lauch Faircloth, and Senator John P. East. He also worked in the House of Representatives as a subcommittee staff director for Representative Larry J. Hopkins and Representative Bob Stump.

In working for Rep. Stump on the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Rick served as minority staff director for the subcommittee on housing and memorial affairs and two years as majority professional staff on funding issues related to veterans' affairs budget and appropriations.

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