

**TESTIMONY OF
CONGRESSMAN MARK E. AMODEI (NV-2)**

**LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON H.R. 4298:
THE VIETNAM HELICOPTER CREW MEMORIAL ACT**

**BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

September 8, 2016

Chairman Heck, Ranking Member Davis, and distinguished members of the Committee: thank you for holding this hearing today and for the opportunity to testify on my legislation, H.R. 4298, the Vietnam Helicopter Crew Memorial Act. I appreciate your interest in my bill and look forward to working with all members of this Committee to advance this important legislation.

As you know, the Vietnam War was the first campaign in which the United States military heavily relied upon helicopters for transportation and combat. Helicopters proved to be a vital part of war efforts, particularly during Operation Frequent Wind wherein they were used to evacuate about 7,000 Americans and Vietnamese from Saigon. The brave pilots and crew members who manned the helicopters touched nearly every aspect of the war. Many of these pilots and crew members are now laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery.

Mr. William Dennison, a constituent of mine, first alerted me to the efforts of the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association (VHPA) and the Vietnam Helicopter Crew Members Association (VHCMA) to place a commemorative memorial in Arlington National Cemetery in April 2015.

A legislative option for the pilots and crew members that died in combat became necessary after the proposed memorial was denied. H.R. 4298 directs the Secretary of the Army to place memorial in Arlington National Cemetery to honor these veterans who paid the ultimate cost.

Since H.R. 4298 was introduced, Arlington National Cemetery has graciously hosted me twice to share their views and show me the cemetery. I understand and appreciate their mission and the necessity of saving all available land for grave space. However, I have concerns by the processes in which they decide what commemorative memorials can be placed within the Cemetery.

As you might be aware, when the VHPA presented their plan to the Advisory Committee on Arlington National Cemetery (ACANC) the Committee had a split vote of three to three. Therefore, the Committee was unable to render a definitive recommendation. Regardless, the Secretary of the Army decided to approve a tree plaque and a virtual memorial, rather than the proposed plan.

It appears the decision rendered by the ACANC is completely subjective to the rest of the deliberative process. Given the iconic nature of rotary wing aircraft, the number of individuals whose lives depended upon helicopters during the war, and the number of those individuals interred at Arlington National Cemetery, this application and these veterans are worthy of more than a simple tree plaque and a virtual tour.

The process in place failed these veterans. There ought to be objective standards in place to ensure that worthy memorials gain rightful consideration and, ultimately, placement in Arlington National Cemetery. This process lacks transparency and any measureable standard for a proposal being approved or disapproved. I understand that not every proposed memorial can be accepted by Arlington. However, when only two memorials without associated remains have been installed in Arlington in the last twenty-five years, I believe that this should be taken as a sign that the process needs to be revised.

While H.R. 4298 may not change this process, it would ensure that a group of veterans who are more than worthy of a memorial, receive proper recognition. I am proud to support this group of veterans and appreciate the Subcommittee's consideration.