

RECORD VERSION

STATEMENT BY

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BEFORE THE

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

SECOND SESSION, 115TH CONGRESS

**ON ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY:
CURRENT OPERATIONS AND FUTURE PLANS TO HONOR THE FALLEN**

MARCH 8, 2018

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY THE
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES**

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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Coffman, Ranking Member Speier and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide a further update to the subcommittee. Arlington National Cemetery – as one of this nation’s hallowed national cemeteries - is an iconic place devoted to honoring the memory of individuals in the armed services who made a significant commitment of service to the defense of our nation. Each week the cemetery faithfully conducts approximately 150 funeral services on behalf of a grateful nation. In fiscal year 2017, Arlington National Cemetery interred nearly 7,100 active duty service members, veterans and their family members. Arlington National Cemetery also annually hosts approximately 3.3 million guests, helping each visitor connect to the sacrifices of our military. On behalf of the Cemetery and the Department of the Army, I express our deep appreciation for the support provided by Congress over these many years.

THE STATE OF ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

The dedicated staff are honored to conduct Arlington National Cemetery’s primary mission, to provide a dignified and honorable final resting place for active duty service members, eligible veterans, and their families. Our daily mission is threefold: to lay to rest – on behalf of a grateful nation - those who have served along with their eligible family members; to connect our guests to the cemetery’s rich history; and to maintain the hallowed grounds in a manner befitting the sacrifice of those who rest in quiet repose. We envision a future Arlington National Cemetery that continues well beyond the next few decades to honor those who served our great nation. The Army recognizes that the cemetery is at a critical point in its history. The cemetery cannot achieve that future with physical expansion alone; changes to eligibility combined with expansion will ensure Arlington continues to be an active cemetery well into the future, or for the next 150 years.

Current projections indicate Arlington National Cemetery will be closed for first interments by the early 2040s. This means that a veteran from the 1991 Gulf War who lives to his or her normal life expectancy will not be able to be interred at Arlington.

Eligibility for Arlington National Cemetery is a difficult and emotional topic. It is also not a new topic. On several occasions during the life of the cemetery, difficult decisions have been made to both expand burial space and to restrict eligibility for burial in order to extend the life of the cemetery. The last significant change to eligibility was in the late 1960s. For decades, the Army has continued to create the means for any veteran, with honorable active duty service, to be laid to rest amongst its rolling hills and columbaria. The cemetery has expanded its boundaries when possible and incorporated modern burial practices in order to accommodate the high demand. Today, we again face the reality of the cemetery closing to new burials if we do not further restrict eligibility. Beyond Southern Expansion, we do not have the benefit of adjacent land into which we can expand and must consider – as others have before us – the difficult task of limiting eligibility at Arlington National Cemetery so that our inevitable future war dead may be laid to rest alongside their fellow warfighters.

LEADERSHIP FOCUS AREAS

As we work to remain an iconic symbol of our nation, we are focused on our day to day mission and ensuring that we can remain an active cemetery for as long as possible. To do this, for our dedicated team at Arlington National Cemetery, I have established three priorities: Readiness, our People, and the Future.

Readiness is achieved when we set the conditions to have the resources we need, when we need them, so that our sacred mission can be accomplished achieving as many as 30 services a day. Our management practices must assure confidence and credibility to ensure the peace of mind of our veterans and of the taxpayers. We cannot allow ourselves to fail those who have given everything for our way of life. Part of the way to

achieve improved readiness is through our budget. The Congressional Marks to Arlington National Cemetery's fiscal year 2018 budget recognized and supported the increased requirements associated with civilian pay increases, contract inflation and security.

We are acutely aware of our people, both our employees and our guests. Arlington National Cemetery operates at a pace that puts pressure on our employees to be near-perfect every day. Over 400,000 are laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery; of those, in the past decade alone, it has been our honor to lay to rest nearly 70,000 of our nation's finest individuals. This intense operational tempo must be tempered with time to sustain the best training practices and time to take care of our employees – our most valuable resource. Additionally, we look to improve the experience for our visitors – by keeping them safe and continually developing enhancements to enrich the time they spend with us at the Cemetery.

The Army remains committed to maintaining Arlington National Cemetery as the nation's premier military cemetery and national shrine in perpetuity. We are also committed to actively serving and honoring our nation's service member, veterans, and their families for as long as possible. The Secretary of the Army's February 2017 report to Congress explains how spatial constraints limit the life of Arlington as an active cemetery and discusses the difficult topics of eligibility and expansion. Key options to consider include redefining eligibility criteria for interment and inurnment, considerations for additional expansion opportunities beyond current boundaries, and evaluating alternative ideas for maximizing the current space within the Cemetery's geographic footprint.

FUTURE OF THE CEMETERY

The future of Arlington National Cemetery is a challenging and emotional subject that requires engagement with the American public to set the proper course. To ensure we hear as many voices as possible, the Army joined together with more than a dozen

military and veteran service organizations to hear from interested citizens and to understand how they view the strategic challenge facing Arlington National Cemetery. In addition to in-person outreach with these groups, in mid-November 2017, we conducted an initial public survey with input from more than 28,000 respondents. The results show that the overwhelming majority – 94% of respondents desired that the cemetery remain active well into the future. The respondents also recognized that keeping the cemetery open well into the future would be a challenging task involving difficult policy choices and costly expansions. Of those who favored keeping the cemetery active, survey results reflected that 50% of those in favor of expansion recognize the need to modify the eligibility policy at the same time. Survey respondents also recognized that further expansion might not be possible; of those, 70% of the respondents support restricting eligibility in some manner to extend the life of the cemetery as an active burial ground for our most deserving veterans.

As discussed in the 2017 Report to Congress, it is not possible to keep Arlington National Cemetery open for generations to come without a candid dialogue on meaningful changes to eligibility. Today any Armed Forces veteran with one day of active duty service is eligible for above ground placement, and any retiree receiving pay is eligible for below ground placement. These two groups are also the majority of those interred or inurned each year at Arlington National Cemetery and represent the extraordinary demand that far outweighs available space. Trends show that approximately 1% of the 20 million eligible veterans and 2 million of the eligible retirees desire to come to Arlington for their final resting place. Their population sizes and their current demand for a place at Arlington will result in the cemetery closing for first interments within the first half of this century if nothing is done to restrict their eligibility in some way.

This fact was most evident during a round table discussion held on January 30, 2018, by the Honor Subcommittee to the Advisory Committee on Arlington National Cemetery. At this round table, representatives from 23 various veteran's service organizations, military service organizations, and interested members from the public

engaged one another in a candid discussion on the realities of limited expansion and restricting eligibility. The open dialogue included the realization that eliminating eligibility for those veterans who have not retired from service; not received a Silver Star or above; were not wounded or killed in action or died while serving on active duty, is necessary in some way. Further, to realize any significant change in prolonging the life of active burials, action must be taken to address the eligible retiree population as well.

Arlington National Cemetery intends to continue this critical national dialogue by conducting a second survey with more refined options. We will continue to inform stakeholders on the limited viability of expanding the cemetery in the National Capitol Region to solve our challenges. The benefits and risks of policy options must be addressed openly and it is our desire to give each stakeholder the information necessary for an honest and thoughtful deliberation of any future changes. The Army anticipates a robust and candid dialogue with stakeholders as we move forward, and will work to achieve a long future that continues to honor our nation's cherished heroes.

In addition to looking at eligibility, we are making near-term efforts to increase the capacity through completion of the Millennium Project and planning for the future Southern Expansion Project. Based on changing conditions and revised estimates, the Army will review future resource requirements to complete the land acquisition, planning, and design efforts for the Defense Access Roads project associated with Southern Expansion.

CONCLUSION

Enabled by the tremendous support of Congress and the diligent efforts of the great employees at Arlington National Cemetery, the Army will continue to sustain the sacred trust of our citizens. We look forward to working with Congress, the Advisory Committee on Arlington National Cemetery, Military Service Organizations,

Veteran Service Organizations, and the public on enabling a future of Arlington National Cemetery that continues its long tradition of honoring our nation's heroes for generations to come.