**DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY**

**COMPLETE STATEMENT**

**OF**

**MS. KATHRYN A. CONDON**

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ARMY NATIONAL MILITARY CEMETERIES**

**BEFORE**

**THE** **SUBCOMMITTEE ON DISABILITY ASSISTANCE**

**AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS**

**COMMITTEE ON VETERANS’ AFFAIRS**

**UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**FIRST SESSION, 113TH CONGRESS**

**“SUSTAINING THE SACRED TRUST:**

**AN UPDATE ON OUR NATIONAL CEMETERIES”**

**MARCH 7, 2013**

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION**

**UNTIL RELEASED BY THE**

**COMMITTEE ON VETERANS’ AFFAIRS**

**STATEMENT BY MS. KATHRYN A. CONDON,**

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ARMY NATIONAL MILITARY CEMETERIES**

Chairman Runyan, Ranking Member Titus and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide an update on Arlington National Cemetery and our efforts to sustain the sacred trust of our Veterans and Families. We have continued to build upon our tremendous progress since my last testimony before this subcommittee a year ago. We have implemented processes to better serve our Veterans, Families and the public. We are using technology to share the data validated through our accountability efforts. We are institutionalizing Army processes and procedures to ensure all changes will endure. We are also setting the industry standards for best practices while working closely with our partner Veterans organizations who I am honored to testify with today.

All at Arlington are committed to constantly improve our operations. The pace of requests and burials at Arlington remains at an all-time high as we enter our busiest time of the year: the spring and summer months. I am concerned that possible Sequestration furloughs will severely impact our workforce as we enter this busiest season for the Nation’s hallowed grounds. Yet, Arlington’s workforce remains committed to provide our Veterans, Families and visitors the honored, solemn experience they deserve.

**OUR FOUNDATION HAS BEEN RESTORED**

Across all facets of the operation, in less than three years Arlington’s transformation could not be more striking. We are developing and using industry-leading and externally-validated standards and auditable business practices. Our newly-trained and dedicated workforce is finally using equipment appropriate for the rolling hills and high water table of Virginia. With the help of the Center of Military History, we have catalogued and are helping restore and preserve 44 boxes and 846 folders of maps, pictures and papers documenting almost 150 years of Arlington’s history. We are implementing energy, environmental and sustainability initiatives across this inherently Green space: hybrid vehicles, sidewalks of recycled materials, earth- and wildlife-friendly landscaping, digital read-aheads and briefs, and environmentally-sensitive supplies. Most importantly, we remain committed to maintaining the chain-of-custody process for all remains, ensuring that a non-negotiable standard of accountability is beyond reproach for everyone resting in solemn repose at Arlington.

These improvements at Arlington have been acknowledged in major inspections conducted over the past year, including those required by and reported to Congress. For instance, the September 2012 Department of the Army Inspector General’s (DAIG) report, submitted in compliance with Public Law 111-339, noted the changes “have transformed (Arlington National Cemetery) and the (Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemetery) into premier institutions of excellence capable of setting the standards for federal cemeteries across the Nation.” The DAIG concluded Arlington had made “wholesale improvements across Cemetery operations—in gravesite accountability, contracting, information and technology, transparency, management, oversight, and interaction with Family members and loved ones.”

Arlington continues to implement recommendations from the inspection by the Government Accountability Office (GAO). For instance, the U.S. Army Manpower Analysis Agency and Force Management Support Agency completed their organizational assessment, which will allow Arlington in April to codify a refined organizational structure more appropriate for our current and future missions. We have started our Organizational Inspection Program, which serves as the basis for Arlington to complete self-assessments and others to complete oversight inspections of Arlington. We continue to work closely with our partner organizations, and have formalized the support relationships with Memorandums of Agreement. I have also continued using our strategic Campaign Plan to lead, manage and resource change across the organization, using the continuously staff-updated metrics and milestones. As noted in the GAO report, the Campaign Plan is my key planning, synchronizing and resourcing document, helping to ensure Arlington maintains standards expected of this national shrine and allocate resources for mission achievement, now and for the future.

As noted also by GAO, Arlington continues to improve its acquisition processes and procedures to remain compliant with Departments of Army and Defense regulations and guidelines. With assistance from the Army Contracting Command and other Army Acquisition organizations, we are achieving greater fidelity in our contracting management and reporting efforts. Of note, we are using the Electronic Defense Automated Requirements Tracking System (eDARTS) to process all requirements packages. The eDARTS process has increased our efficiency and creates auditable records, helping Arlington ensure it remains a responsible steward of all funds provided.

The Advisory Committee on Arlington National Cemetery, under the leadership of the Honorable Max Cleland, continues to provide valuable insights and strategic guidance for Arlington’s future. Now as a non-discretionary committee, the Committee endorsed Arlington’s efforts to pursue designation as an arboretum by the Cemetery’s 150th anniversary in 2014, helping preserve the cemetery's cultural and natural history. The Committee is also helping guide our planning for the commemoration of the John F. Kennedy assassination and Arlington burial, monumental events for our Nation and Arlington that occurred fifty years ago this November.

The Advisory Committee was also pivotal in our recent renovation of our Welcome Center. In coordination with the US Army Center of Military History, on Inauguration Weekend we dedicated this improved facility that brings to life the honor, history, traditions and events associated with our Nation's premier military cemetery. By combining Army expertise and ingenuity with Arlington’s history and beauty, we completed the first major upgrade to the historical displays in over 20 years.

**Cemetery Expansion and Critical Infrastructure Repair**

The Army is committed to maintaining Arlington as an active cemetery for as long as possible for our Nation’s military heroes. We have three ongoing expansion projects: Columbarium Court 9, the Millennium Project and Navy Annex. Once complete, these projects are expected to extend Arlington’s first interment burials through the 2050s. In less than two years, we broke ground on the ninth Columbarium Court and will hold its dedication ceremony on May ninth. Its 20,296 niches will extend Arlington’s above-ground burial space to 2024. Working closely with the Norfolk District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the National Park Service, the Commission of Fine Arts, the National Capital Planning Commission, our Advisory Committee, and other agencies on the design for Millennium Project, we have reached the 65% design point. We are taking great care to create an environmentally-responsible design, incorporating the area’s natural beauty and historic nature. With funding requested in the President’s FY13 budget, we will complete the Millennium Project design and be able to begin construction this Fiscal Year. Finally, demolition began on the Navy Annex building in November 2012 and is scheduled to be completed by August 2013. We continue to work closely with Arlington County, as well as our other partners from the Millennium Project, awaiting funding to complete the Navy Annex’s design.

As directed by Congress and the Secretary of the Army, we are also nearing completion of our new Master Plan, last updated in 1998, and we will provide that plan upon its completion. We are coordinating with forty federal, District of Columbia, Virginia, Arlington County, and non-governmental organizations to complete the Master Plan, which will provide us a valuable roadmap to more deliberately manage and request resources for these hallowed grounds. Finally, we will soon complete our first-ever Integrated Cultural Resources Management Plan (ICRMP). In addition to helping Arlington more systematically maintain the historic and cultural items already in our care, our efforts to complete the ICRMP will start our application to finally be registered on the National Register of Historic Places.

Arlington continues to work diligently to complete the most critical repairs to our aging infrastructure. While compiling the breadth of our maintenance needs, we used the more than $32.6 million recovered from un-liquidated obligations to fund the repairs most critical to our health, safety and public outreach missions. For instance, we repaired the leaking roof in the Welcome Center for the first time since the 1970s and installed its new Heating,Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) unit, after both had catastrophic failures. We replaced over 230,000 square feet of the flagstone walkway at the Memorial Amphitheater, improving the beauty and safety of this national treasure. We have replaced a small percentage of our antiquated 2-inch, 6-inch and 16-inch water lines located throughout the cemetery, whose almost weekly failures create unsightly geysers and unsafe conditions for Families and visitors. We are completing repair of the John F. Kennedy Eternal Flame, ensuring this iconic memorial remains functional, safe and more energy-efficient for future generations. We replaced fire alarm systems across all offices and workspaces at Arlington. We are also finishing renovations to our two lodges, allowing Arlington’s Superintendent to live on-site and increasing our available workspace for the additional staff validated by the manpower study.

**Information Technology as an Enabler**

On March 12, 2012, Arlington National Cemetery became the first national cemetery to geospatially (digitally) manage cemetery operations. Geospatial information system (GIS) technology, coupled with the authoritative data we validated during our accountability efforts, now form a single, state-of-the-art, authoritative digital ANC map. This GIS-based system helps synchronize all phases of our operations, from scheduling to headstone placement to authoritative documentation. Through these efforts, Arlington has also been able to transfer its paper records to the National Archives and Records Administration, ahead of the President's Managing Government Records Directive.

Leveraging this technology, on October 22, 2012 we also launched *ANC Explorer*. The first version of this free, web-based application allows Families and the public to locate gravesites, events or other points of interest throughout the Cemetery; generate front-and-back photos of a headstone or monument; and receive directions to these locations. We have installed kiosks with *ANC Explorer* in our Welcome Center, and we are also working with industry to field several outdoor kiosks throughout the cemetery. Recognized by the Federal Mobile Computing Summit as its 2013 “App of the Year,” we are already working to add and refine the application. Since launching *ANC Explorer*, over 23,150 users have downloaded the application. We have also received 452 feedback comments, which are helping inform subsequent versions of the application.

Information Technology (IT) will buttress and help integrate all aspects of Arlington’s mission in the future. Long-gone are the typewriters, 3x5 cards and paper maps: Even our most die-hard paper enthusiasts, having worked at Arlington for three decades, now pride themselves on the accuracy and efficiency of our geospatial (digital) capabilities. To ensure our IT investments enhance and support our priority efforts, in May we published our enterprise architecture (EA) plan, also completing this GAO recommendation. As with our other strategic documents, Arlington remains committed to keeping the EA updated to ensure our IT program remains focused and synchronized with our desired future state business processes.

**Accountability**

Establishing gravesite accountability has been at the core of Arlington’s efforts to sustain the sacred trust with our veterans and families. Over the past year we have remained focused on completing the authoritative data set of all gravesites at Arlington, validated using a transparent and auditable process. The effort has three critical parts: 1) Ensuring we have dispositive records that support each individual interred or inurned at that location, 2) validating that the grave marker is consistent with available records, and 3) verifying the marker location is accurately recorded in our GIS system.

This undertaking required a review of all existing gravesites. Due to the complexity and fidelity of historical data, by the end of April we expect to complete the final phase of this accountability process. As with earlier phases of this baseline accountability effort, the authoritative information is added to our GIS system. This system, coupled with our existing quality assurance procedures and Organizational Inspection Program, will help ensure end-to-end fidelity in our operations going forward.

**WORK REMAINS**

I could not be more proud of the men and women of Arlington who have worked diligently to restore the honor and dignity across every aspect of this national shrine. And while we have made great strides, work remains to improve our service to our Veterans and Families. For instance, while Families are willing to wait for burials at Arlington, including for an Old Post Chapel service or a specific date, the sustained demand for burial services at Arlington has resulted in wait times that can be up to six months. We need to improve on keeping pace with the average of 220 weekly scheduling requests, which can result in hundreds of families with cremated remains waiting to be scheduled. This is our top priority and we are making progress in reducing this backlog and wait time. We are also working with the Department of the Army for hiring freeze exception requests to backfill critical positions left open through attrition. Rest assured, reducing wait times is now our highest priority issue to fix.

We are also focusing on our long delay in ordering and placing headstones, helping Families bring closure to their loved one’s passing. Until recently, our cumbersome process to input manually the headstone request from within our Army scheduling system to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) ordering system created a multi-month lag. Through extended partnering efforts with the VA’s Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record Program Management Office, last month Arlington finally began integrating our headstone ordering within our GIS system. Without losing our connectivity with the VA, once fully implemented this month, our cemetery personnel will be able to enter burial data one time into a single application, which is then used for scheduling and conducting the service, ordering the marker, placing the marker, and capturing the headstone photo. This will reduce dramatically a family’s wait to see their loved one’s marker in place. Using this new system for ordering markers also eliminates errors caused by manually entering data into a second application. By April, this capability will allow us to eliminate the headstone backlog.

From a facilities perspective, we must also complete significant infrastructure projects to improve the functionality and workplace environment. For instance, we have recently replaced three HVAC units, yet two additional HVACs in our maintenance area need replacement. Many roads are in disrepair and crumbling, creating safety hazards and detracting from the national shrine’s expected appearance. Over 40,000 linear feet of waterlines are more than 50 years old. We have replaced only the most deteriorated 2,500 linear feet to date. Moving forward, we are using our Master Plan and 10-year Capitalization Plan to plan and prioritize major repairs and routine maintenance.

**THE IMPACTS OF THE CONTINUING RESOLUTION AND SEQUESTRATION**

As with most Federal organizations, Arlington is facing significant fiscal uncertainties. Our fiscal year 2013 President’s Budget included several critical requests that are not funded under the current Continuing Resolution (CR). These requests include the previously authorized $25 million for critical infrastructure restoration and modernization and $103 million for expansion projects: $84 million to begin the Millennium Project construction and $19 million to begin the Navy Annex planning and design. In the event of a full year CR for FY13, our funding will be reduced to $45.8 million from the requested $173.8 million.

Arlington is also scheduled for a 5% Sequestration decrement, further reducing FY13 available funding to $43.5 million, or approximately 25% of the original budget request. The potential of mandated Sequestration furloughs to Arlington’s civilian workforce couldalso severely impact Arlington’s ability to serve our Veterans and Families in the professional and timely manner expected.

Furloughs could not come at a worse time for Arlington. Historically, April to September is Arlington's peak period of funeral and tourist activity. Arlington completes its seven-day a week mission with only 142 assigned civilians, already reduced due to the hiring freeze. In addition, Arlington's Monday through Saturday burial operations must adjust based on weather events—including those working outside and those providing direct logistical, technology and operational support—making 20% reductions that much more devastating. Based on historical burial demand, furloughs will require Arlington to reduce the number of burial services it conducts by 35 each week. Forty families each week will also not be scheduled for burials, further delaying their wait time.

**CONCLUSION**

Through diligent efforts, adherence to established procedures and by leveraging technology, Arlington will do all within its power to sustain the sacred trust it has recently reclaimed. Despite the challenges the Sequestration presents, the Arlington staff can assure the Nation of this: burial services at Arlington will continue to be conducted with honor and dignity for our Veterans and their Families.