

**RECORD VERSION**

**STATEMENT BY**

**MR. PATRICK K. HALLINAN  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ARMY NATIONAL MILITARY CEMETERIES**

**BEFORE THE**

**VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DISABILITY ASSISTANCE AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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**ON DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY'S VIEWS ON  
THE MEDAL OF HONOR LEGACY ACT**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Chairman Abraham, Ranking Member Titus, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide the Department of the Army's views on the Medal of Honor Legacy Act.

Arlington National Cemetery is a unique and iconic place devoted to those individuals who made a significant life commitment of service to the defense of our Nation in the armed services. Arlington National Cemetery was originally established as a National Cemetery for "Soldiers who die in the service of the country." Eligibility has changed through time but always honored individuals who made a significant life commitment of service. These heroes served in every war or conflict since the founding of our Nation. Arlington National Cemetery maintains the honor and dignity of each graveside service while hosting approximately 4 million guests annually. This duality of purpose brings the sacrifices of those buried at Arlington National Cemetery closer to the American people. On behalf of the cemetery and the Department of the Army, I express our appreciation for the support that Congress has provided over the years.

### **THE CEMETERY'S ELIGIBILITY HISTORY**

In May 1864, Arlington National Cemetery was established as one of the first 12 National Cemeteries as a place to inter "Soldiers who die in the service of the country." Eligibility has significantly expanded over time to include all former members of the Armed Forces whose last service terminated honorably as well as their eligible dependents.

## **MEDAL HONOR OF LEGACY ACT**

The proposed Medal of Honor Legacy Act legislation as drafted, would direct the Secretary of the Army to reserve a certain number of burial plots at Arlington National Cemetery for individuals who have been awarded the Medal of Honor, and for other purposes.

The Army understands that the intent of the proposed legislation is to honor the recipients of the Medal of Honor; however, the legislation as drafted does not address broader concerns of eligibility to preserve the life of the cemetery well into the future. This Bill will reestablish gravesite reservations that were eliminated by Congress in December 2010. Reservation of gravesites for one specific group will ultimately exclude persons who also went above and beyond in their service to our Nation, including those who pay the ultimate sacrifice and die in the defense of our nation.

Currently there are a total of 3,497 Medal of Honor recipients from all conflicts, 77 of those are living recipients. At present, there are 406 Medal of Honor recipients interred throughout the more than 70 sections of Arlington National Cemetery. Burial decisions are ultimately the personal preferences of the deceased and their family; we should not assume they will all choose interment at Arlington National Cemetery. Based on past history, we are confident that if asked, most living recipients would prefer to be buried among comrades with whom they served.

The present rate of interment and inurnment coupled with the current inventory of available gravesites and niches (which includes the nearly complete Millennium project but does not include the unfunded Southern Expansion project) indicates that Arlington National Cemetery will run out of space for first interments or inurnments in the mid-2030s. The impact of this legislation may result in unavailability of gravesites for future servicemembers killed in action.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Army understands the general intent of the legislation, however, the bill does not address the broader question of how long does our Nation want Arlington National Cemetery to remain an open and active cemetery. The ability to redefine eligibility, with the possibility of extending beyond our current borders to gain more contiguous space, will allow the Army to ensure the cemetery remains available for first interments for our Nations heroes well into the future. We must take a holistic approach to solve this issue, which will require extensive coordination with the Military Services, Veterans Service Organizations, Advisory Committee on Arlington National Cemetery, and Congress.

Chairman Abraham and Ranking Member Titus, this concludes my testimony. I will gladly respond to any questions that you or the subcommittee members may have.