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Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs (DAMA)

House Committee on Veterans' Affairs

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Morgan Luttrell, Ranking Member Chris Pappas, and members of the subcommittee.

I am writing to respectfully bring attention to the urgent need for sheltered areas in national and state veterans' cemeteries funded by the Department of Veterans Affairs. As a disabled veteran and advocate, I feel compelled to highlight the necessity for enhanced protective infrastructure to shield attendees, particularly elderly and disabled veterans and their families, from increasingly extreme weather conditions.

This issue is personal to me. My father, an Army veteran, is buried at a veterans' cemetery, and my 80-year-old mother regularly attends ceremonies to honor his memory. Sadly, during these events, she often faces harsh conditions, either sitting in the sun or standing in the rain, which can be quite difficult for her. For elderly family members and older veterans, prolonged exposure to extreme weather can make attending these important ceremonies an exhausting or even prohibitive experience.

The effects of climate change have made this issue particularly pressing in regions where the heat index has risen sharply. This summer, territories and states like Guam, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Florida, Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico experienced record-breaking heat indices. A simple shelter—a roof supported by columns, allowing for airflow and enough space for folding chairs—would make a significant difference in providing veterans and their families with a safe, dignified place to honor their loved ones, regardless of the weather.

I invite you to visit one of the national veterans' cemeteries in areas where climate change is taking a toll. Picture yourself as an older disabled veteran or a loved one paying respects at these sacred places during one of the many events held throughout the year. Experiencing firsthand what our veterans and their families endure would highlight the urgent need for change; it is often difficult to understand the challenges unless you step into their shoes.

Currently, some sites provide limited temporary shelters, but these are inadequate for larger crowds and do not offer consistent protection. A permanent solution with dedicated funding for sturdy, covered structures would ensure veterans, and their families can participate in commemorations safely, comfortably, and with dignity.

As we strive to honor the legacy of our veterans, I urge you to consider allocating resources to build these permanent protective structures at VA cemeteries. Doing so would demonstrate a tangible commitment to the well-being of our veterans and their families, ensuring they can safely honor and remember those who served.

Thank you for your attention to this vital issue.

Sincerely,

Jose "Ace" Acevedo
Navy Veteran