

**Written Statement of
Secretary Charles K. Djou
American Battle Monuments Commission
before the
House Veterans Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs
July 10, 2024**

Chairman Luttrell, Ranking Member Pappas, members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the invitation to testify this morning on behalf of the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) regarding the Flowers for Fallen Heroes Act of 2024.

We have no objection to this initiative and appreciate Congressman Zinke allowing us to work with his staff on the language of the bill. The bill gives us the mission and the authority to renew a flower ordering process through our Commission, but also gives us the flexibility to determine how best to "... establish a modern and secure program and payment system for members of the public to order floral arrangements for gravesites under the Commission's purview ..."

I am pleased to report, however, that we can take action without additional legislation. The Administration has determined that ABMC has the legislative authority to restart the program and has encouraged us to do so. Accordingly, we will immediately begin the planning process to accomplish this mission. It will not happen overnight; we must develop an efficient and secure ordering and payment process to facilitate constituent floral orders for our 26 overseas cemeteries.

We will negotiate the most favorable pricing possible; we will market the program to encourage floral placements to honor the sacrifice of the war dead buried or memorialized within ABMC cemeteries; and we will keep the Administration and Congress informed of our progress as program implementation moves forward.

For the record, we have never prohibited the placement of flowers at ABMC gravesites. We closed the old Flower Fund program in 2015 because we believed it was no longer needed in an era of international commerce. Our website provided contact information for international florists and local florists near our cemeteries. And we continued to provide a form online for constituents to request a photo of flowers they ordered in place at the gravesite. We simply took ourselves out of a middleman role in that process.

Flowers can and always will be allowed to be placed at gravesites in ABMC cemeteries.

We understand the importance of remembering our nation's heroes who died and remain interred overseas. That is our mission, and we will always honor that sacred trust. The care with which we maintain our overseas cemeteries, and the commemorative, educational, and visitor services programs we designed to ensure the service and sacrifice of those we honor is never forgotten attest to that commitment.

We consider it a privilege to have been given the honor of caring for our nation's war heroes buried overseas, to be the guardian of their legacy, and we take that responsibility to heart.

Reintroduction of an ABMC flower program will further that mission.

Thank you.