

RECORD VERSION

STATEMENT BY

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BEFORE THE

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

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**ON MEMORIALIZING OUR VETERANS: OUTREACH, UPKEEP, AND COMMUNITY
PARTNERSHIPS AT VETERANS' CEMETERIES**

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COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Luttrell and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss efforts by the Office of Army Cemeteries (OAC) and Army National Military Cemeteries (ANMC) to memorialize our veterans. On behalf of our dedicated military and civilian professional workforce and the Department of the Army, we appreciate the support provided by Congress and especially this subcommittee over these many years.

THE OFFICE OF ARMY CEMETERIES

The Office of Army Cemeteries' (OAC) mission is to provide oversight and expertise for all Army cemeteries through policy, program management, inspections, training, and assistance, honoring those laid to rest in perpetuity on Army owned property.

Through this mission OAC provides management oversight for 11 Department of War cemeteries and 32 Army cemeteries, which include two national cemeteries, the Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemetery and Arlington National Cemetery.

OAC sets the strategic direction and oversees the implementation of policies and programs for all Army cemeteries. Additionally, OAC manages doctrine, plans, and standards across the military cemeteries enterprise. We do this in close coordination with our partners, including the National Cemetery Administration (NCA), the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC), the National Park Service (NPS), the Office of the Secretary of War, and other military services and commands.

OAC establishes and maintains gravesite accountability, provides technical guidance, training, staff assistance, and inspections for cemetery responsible officials across the Department of War cemetery enterprise, public works departments and those who directly or indirectly care for Army cemeteries and service member plots both

inside and outside Army installation grounds. OAC also adjudicates burial exceptions, disinterments, expansion requests, and other issues of concern at the Army cemeteries.

ARMY NATIONAL MILITARY CEMETERIES

The Army is honored to operate two of our Nation's national cemeteries, Army National Military Cemeteries, consisting of Arlington National Cemetery and the US Soldiers' and Airmen's Home Cemetery, where our team serves the American people across generations by laying to rest those who have served our Nation with dignity and honor. Simultaneously, we preserve a living history that educates and inspires millions of visitors each year.

ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

Arlington National Cemetery (ANC) represents the American people for past, present, and future generations by laying to rest those few who have served our nation with dignity and honor while immersing millions of guests per year in the cemetery's living history. ANC is uniquely positioned as an active burial ground interring annually an average of 5,500 servicemembers, Veterans and their eligible family member(s) as well as serving as a center of both cultural and natural resources for our nation. Not only are we honored to represent our nation as hallowed grounds, but we are also proud to be an accredited Level III Arboretum. With a wide variety of horticulture, our visitors can experience everything from seasonal flowers to state champion level trees.

In addition to around three million visitors a year and over 3,000 public ceremonies, operations at ANC remain at a high tempo. The unrelenting demand for burials at ANC remains at an average pace of 24 to 27 funeral services each weekday. During Fiscal Year 2025, we interred over 5,200 Servicemembers, Veterans, and eligible family members with over 6,200 requests for burial. Currently for Fiscal Year 2026, we've interred over 3,100 Servicemembers, Veterans, and eligible family members with over 3,500 requests for burial. Demand for interment at Arlington National Cemetery remains high, but space remains finite.

One of the many defining elements of ANC are the military funeral honors offered to eligible veterans. Those who choose to inter their loved one at ANC receive a level of military honors that far exceeds what is required by law and is not available anywhere else. These honors range from a firing party, body bearers, and bugler to play Taps to extended honors including a military escort platoon and military band. In addition to military honors, Veterans and Servicemembers at the rank of E-9, CW-5, O-6 and above and those killed in action, former prisoners of war, and Medal of Honor recipients are eligible for Caisson conveyance. In addition, Army and Marine Corps colonels and general officers may be provided a caparisoned (rider-less) horse, if available. Army, Navy and Marine Corps general officers may receive a battery cannon salute, if available. Minute guns may be used for general officers/flag officers of the Coast Guard, Marine Corps and Navy, if available.

Since June of 2025, we have coordinated and worked directly with the Military District of Washington to reintegrate Caisson conveyance at ANC for those eligible in a safe and diligent manner. We are pleased with the progress and look forward to increasing mission capacity in accordance with the FY25 NDAA towards the end of this calendar year.

EDUCATION PROGRAM

As America nears its 250th birthday, the ANC Education Program does more than tell the story of the cemetery; it tells the story of our nation. Available to the public at no cost, the program reaches educators, students, and lifelong learners across every congressional district and around the globe. We have developed comprehensive modules for elementary, middle, and high school students, as well as lifelong learners, making the stories of our nation's heroes accessible for traditional classrooms, hybrid learning environments, and through both virtual and in-person visits.

Through our portal at education.arlingtoncemetery.mil, these resources connect Americans directly to our rich military heritage and the service and sacrifice that have shaped our Republic. Ultimately, to teach the history of ANC is to teach the history of our nation, ensuring that the values of service, honor, and sacrifice continue to inspire our future.

SOUTHERN EXPANSION/OTHER PROJECTS

ANMC executes a robust construction program to sustain, restore, and modernize our infrastructure. We are thankful for the funding provided by Congress to ensure current and future generations can immerse themselves in the rich history of Arlington National Cemetery.

We successfully opened our previous expansion area, the Millennium Expansion, in September 2018. This 27-acre expansion provided over 27,000 additional burial opportunities. We are excited about the continued progress with our ongoing Southern Expansion. With the recent award of the third and final phase, which will construct the in-ground burial sections and additional Columbaria Courts, we anticipate realizing the benefit of over 80,000 new burial opportunities in 2029, which is expected to extend the life of the cemetery to the early 2060s. Meanwhile, the Defense Access Road / Phase I project is nearing its completion in Fall 2026 with remaining work concentrated around the realigned Highway 27 ramps. The second phase project constructing the future ANC Operations Complex south of Columbia Pike is on-track for occupation in 2nd Quarter FY 2027.

Our Entry Corridor Development project incorporating former National Park Service property continues to advance. We are nearing completion on a feasibility study that will use the additional acreage to address physical security challenges and improve how we welcome the families of those we inter as well as the millions of annual visitors to ANC. We expect to enter the design phase for this program in 2nd Quarter FY 2027.

We are also executing multiple projects to preserve our cultural resources including the planning for a major renovation of the Memorial Amphitheater to address water infiltration issues as well as necessary structural improvements. Finally, we continue to recapitalize and enhance our aging infrastructure such as roads and underground utilities.

ANC CAPACITY

We greatly appreciate the support of Congress for the resources required to maintain, sustain and expand Arlington National Cemetery. As a complement to these efforts, our teams work annually to identify additional burial opportunities across the current cemetery footprint. This year we were able to identify over 300 additional locations for inground cremation burials in older areas of the cemetery, where newer, smaller equipment can be used for interments. We continuously seek opportunities to increase the number of graves available and extend our burial capacity. With current expansion efforts and burial rates, Arlington National Cemetery is expected to remain open to new burials until the 2060s.

We recognize that the FY19 NDAA directed the Secretary of the Army, in consultation with the Secretary of Defense, to "prescribe revised criteria for interment at Arlington National Cemetery that preserve Arlington National Cemetery as an active burial ground 'well into the future' defined as 150 years." The Army continues to work with partner services, the Department of War, and Veteran and Military Service Organizations to address this directive and consider the best way to preserve Arlington National Cemetery while also honoring our nation's fallen.

SOLDIERS AND AIRMEN'S HOME NATIONAL CEMETERY

One of the country's oldest national cemeteries, the United States Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemetery is located just north of the Armed Forces Retirement Home (commonly referred to as the Soldiers' and Airmen's Home) in Washington, D.C. It is the final resting place of more than 14,000 veterans, including many who fought in

the Civil War, and 21 Medal of Honor recipients, the nation's highest military decoration. Along with Arlington National Cemetery, Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemetery is one of two national cemeteries maintained by the Department of the Army. Eligibility for interment at the Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemetery remains limited to eligible residents of the Armed Forces Retirement Home. The Army remains honored to care for the graves of these Servicemembers and the historic cemetery as we continue to inter less than ten eligible residents each year.

OUR VETERANS HAVE OPTIONS

It should be noted that Arlington National Cemetery is only one of many resting places for our nation's veterans and their families to choose for burial. Our team works closely with Veterans and families who are not eligible or choose not to wait for a service at ANC to ensure a positive hand-off to our partners at the Department of Veterans Affairs, National Cemetery Administration (NCA). We work closely to ensure we communicate using our public website which hosts an interactive map with links to NCA cemeteries, an ANC Eligibility Questionnaire that provides real time information to servicemembers, Veterans and families, as well as transfers cases between our ANC and NCA robust call center systems. As the NCA communicates to Veterans, there are 157 national cemeteries, as well as 124 state, territorial, and tribal cemeteries available within 75 miles of 94% of our nation's Veterans. There are also several Army post cemeteries where local retirees can choose to be buried. Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families have several dignified options when exercising their burial benefits, ensuring that no matter where they rest, their service is honored with the utmost respect.

RIGHTS OF THE FALLEN

As part of the Army's efforts to care for our nation's servicemembers, OAC is also engaged in an emerging challenge to ensure dignified burials for the remains of servicemembers from 18th and 19th century conflicts within the United States. This initiative, known as Rights of the Fallen, consists of education and engagement with

federal and state entities, archaeological organizations and outreach to prevent the unnecessary deliberate disinterment of the remains of service members from conflicts prior to World War II. The OAC team works to ensure that any inadvertently disinterred remains are treated with respect, and every effort is made to rapidly reinter the remains in an appropriate site, preferably in a nearby National Cemetery that can guarantee both accountability and perpetual care. Over the last eight years, OAC has facilitated the dignified reinterment for the remains of 50 deceased servicemembers, and three disassociated limbs, across 6 locations. These remains were recovered from CONUS battlefields, spanning from the Revolutionary War through the Civil War.

CHAPLAINS HILL

I am pleased to report significant progress in fulfilling the mandate of Section 1092 of the Fiscal Year 2026 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to update the Protestant and Catholic chaplains' memorials at Arlington National Cemetery. The Office of the Chief of Chaplains from each service has provided the affirmed list of names eligible for inclusion on the memorials. Additionally, my team met with officials from the National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces (NCMAF) on March 26, 2026, to discuss the way forward. We value their partnership and expertise in this important undertaking.

We will continue to work closely with the NCMAF to approve the final design and coordinate the installation timeline. As stipulated by 38 U.S.C. §2409, the NCMAF will coordinate construction and placement using private funds to add names of those service chaplains who died between the time the monuments were placed in the 1980s to the date of the NDAA.

THE NATIONAL MEMORIAL DAY OBSERVATION

Every year, Arlington National Cemetery is honored to host our nation's commemoration of those that have made the ultimate sacrifice during the National Memorial Day Observance. This year Arlington National Cemetery hosted several

events open to the public. Visitors had the opportunity to lay flowers at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier during the annual Flowers of Remembrance event, the opportunity to attend the annual Memorial Day Observance, as well as enjoy a special musical tribute and storytelling as part of America's 250th celebration within the Memorial Amphitheater. ANMC works closely with several Military and Veteran Service Organizations to honor and support Servicemembers, Veterans and Families throughout the Memorial Day weekend. These include but are not limited to the American Gold Star Mothers, Gary Sinise Foundation, Travis Manion Foundation, and mobile veteran support center access in key locations on Arlington Cemetery throughout the weekend.

THE VALUE OF PARTNERSHIP

Looking ahead, both the Office of Army Cemeteries and the Army National Military Cemeteries remain engaged with the Veteran population as well as our partners across the military cemetery enterprise. Our teams are actively engaged with the National Cemeteries Administration on many fronts. Most recently we have been collaborating on our automated accountability systems of record. The Department of Army Enterprise Interment Services System, known as EISS, ensures 100% accountability from eligibility to perpetual commemoration. The web service technology, geospatial mapping and cemetery management components allow modern management of all functions of cemetery operations. Over the past several months, our teams have partnered to map out system requirements and develop modern cemetery management technology alongside the NCA. We highly value this interagency teamwork, which extends to the Cemeteries Working Group where administrators from OAC, ANMC, NCA, ABMC, and NPS share best practices and initiatives; included is training through the OAC/ANMC hosted Cemetery Responsible Official course offered twice annually. Our interagency group also participates in both the Department of War Combined Joint Casualty and Mortuary Board, and Cemeteries Management Board. In these forums we share cemetery management challenges and best practices. Additionally, ANMC conducts outreach by hosting webinars and maintaining

relationships with veteran and military organizations, as well as survivor assistance organizations, providing stakeholders with a direct line of communication to transparent and accurate information about eligibility and wait times.

CONCLUSION

Through the diligent efforts of our dedicated military and civilian team serving at Arlington National Cemetery, enabled by the tremendous support of Congress, and especially this subcommittee, the Army will continue to sustain the sacred trust of the American people. We look forward to working with Congress, our partners at the VA and ABMC, Military Service and Veteran Service Organizations, and the American people to sustain all Army Cemeteries, the Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemetery, and Arlington National Cemetery with its long tradition of honoring our nation's heroes for generations to come, while simultaneously providing outreach, oversight, and perpetual care for the graves of our servicemembers, Veterans and their families.