

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD OF  
IAN de PLANQUE, DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION  
THE AMERICAN LEGION  
TO THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DISABILITY  
AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS  
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
ON  
"ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY: AN UPDATE FROM THE NEW  
ADMINISTRATION"**

**JUNE 23, 2011**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Without question, the failures of past leadership at Arlington National Cemetery are inexcusable. The hallowed ground, a little over 600 acres of northern Virginia hillside, has stood since this nation's Civil War as the crown jewel of reverence for the fallen warriors, the men and women who have served this nation in peacetime and war in the air, on land and at sea. Arlington National Cemetery is the epicenter of a country's reverence for these service members. This is the sacred ground of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and John F. Kennedy's Eternal Flame. Yet past management of these grounds led to a state of disorder, disrepair and disrespect that was clearly disgraceful.

Last summer, in June of 2010, the transition of management began. Kathryn Condon took up the post of Executive Director of the Army National Cemeteries Program, and other changes would follow. Director Condon and her team have been tireless and honest, sometimes brutally so, in the pursuit of righting this sinking ship. The American Legion applauds Director Condon for her forthright efforts to correct these errors.

In Washington, it is not unheard of to sweep unpleasant truths out of the public eye. Facts which reflect poorly upon an organization or program are recast with new spin. It's almost unheard of to admit to shortcomings and failings. In this light, the candor from the new management team over the past year has been refreshing. This administration has not shied from hard truths; they have instead met them head on.

The news coming from the cemetery was seldom good, and often horrifying, but it was also honest. America learned of mislabeled remains, and bodies buried in the wrong locations. This was not some trivial matter thought to have occurred once or twice, but perhaps in 6,000 locations or more. Cemetery staff, when questioned by incoming management regarding standard procedure manuals for burials and plot alignment admitted no such written records existed, and work had been handed down by word of mouth. Electronic records did not exist, information was stored on index cards as if the Nation's most prominent military cemetery was a

1950's muffler shop. Perhaps the only thing more eye opening than the litany of prior failings at the cemetery was the willingness of new management to dig deep enough to find all of the errors and begin plans to set them aright.

A year later, Arlington Cemetery is far from fixed, but it is on the road to recovery. The American Legion recognizes the hard work and dedication of the management and staff to make things right. While it cannot be definitively said no more scandals are left to surface, there is at least a newfound sense of confidence management will not flinch from addressing these scandals head on and will at least work to make things right.

Yet even so, this cannot be the long term solution.

The American Legion urges Congress to place the responsibility of managing, operating, and maintaining Arlington National Cemetery and the U.S. Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemetery in Washington, D.C directly with the Department of Veterans Affairs through the National Cemetery Administration (NCA). In the entire government, no other agency can match the track record of success and satisfaction NCA has worked hard to achieve. NCA is well known for their attention to detail, and their ability to perform the task of ensuring the dignity of or fallen service members like no other.

Arlington Cemetery may struggle with electronic tracking of gravesites, but NCA has a system already in operation. A downloadable "app" for smart phones is available to utilize this electronic gravesite tracker on the go. Why look outside for technology already existing and run by individuals with the expertise already in hand? Why reinvent the wheel?

The Department of Defense (DOD) is deeply engrossed in the business of war fighting. Sidelining resources of money and staff to non war fighting tasks degrades efficiency within DOD. NCA is already managing 131 cemeteries and doing it well. As any business would point out, management costs can be better amortized when spread over a large operation in this nature, and the costs to absorb Arlington and the US Soldier's and Airmen's Home National Cemeteries would result in net cost saving for the government as a whole.

The American Legion is mindful of the proud tradition of the Army in maintaining this facility and recognizes the importance to the Army, those presently serving and veterans, of restoring honor to the facility. Nobody questions the performance of the Army in the ceremonial tasks and duties they have always performed, and performed with distinction. The American Legion believes the responsibilities of the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment, traditionally known as "The Old Guard," which include conducting military ceremonies at Arlington National Cemetery, manning the 24-hour vigil at the Tomb of the Unknowns, and being the provider of military funeral escorts at Arlington, should never change, as a result of any reorganization associated with Arlington National Cemetery.

What transpired at Arlington National Cemetery was unconscionable. The past is immutable and cannot be changed. All that may change is how we face the future. To this end, as we begin to move past the immediacy of crisis and into long range planning, The American Legion again stresses the importance of ensuring future operations are smooth, professional and worthy of the

gravity afforded to the task of granting our service members rest with reverence and dignity. While the efforts of Director Condon and Superintendent Hallinan are laudable, they do not represent a long term solution, nor should that be asked of them. The American Legion asks Congress to begin the transitional process of transferring management authority for Arlington National Cemetery and the US Soldier's and Airmen's Home National Cemetery to the National Cemetery Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The US Government has, in NCA, an outstanding body dedicated to providing for the reverential treatment of the eternal remains of our fallen, and it is time we handed the future of Arlington to them. Then, and only then, can we begin to move forward with confidence these shameful events will never be repeated.