From: March, Joseph H.
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The American Legion

For God and country

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Arlington Cemetery revamp underway

MINNEAPOLIS (Aug. 27, 2011) -- The Department of Veterans Affairs' National Cemetery Administration doesn't have oversight over Arlington National Cemetery. But it hopes to have some influence over the sacred cemetery's administrative overhaul.

Arlington was rocked with a scandal in 2010 that included graves being mismarked and unmarked, burial urns being unearthed and dumped out; millions of dollars also were mismanaged. The cemetery's executives were removed from their positions, and Kathryn Condon was named executive director of the Army National Cemeteries Program, which oversees long-term planning and day-to-day operations of Arlington. And the man in charge of VA's national cemetery system believes the changes made will correct the problems Arlington faced.

"We do not run Arlington National Cemetery," Steve L. Muro, under secretary for VA's Memorial Affairs, told The American Legion on Saturday during the organization's 93rd National Convention in Minneapolis. "The superintendent (Patrick K. Hallinan) used to be the director of (NCA's) field ops. The deputy superintendent (James Gemmell) used to run Ft. Snelling National Cemetery. They are staffing up from NCA, and we're going to make sure they got back on their feet and do what they need to do."

Muro, who overseas NCA's 131 cemeteries, said the agency is in its largest expansion since the Civil War. And in the midst of that, NCA continues to receive high marks from its customers. It received a rating of 94 in the American Customer Satisfaction survey, the highest of any organization in 2010 and the fourth time in 10 years it's received the top rating.

Muro said 70.4 percent of its employees are veterans, tops among all federal agencies, and that 12 percent of the agency's procurements are given to veteran-owned businesses.

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