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IS THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS CEMETERY CONSTRUCTION POLICY MEETING THE NEEDS OF TODAY'S VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES?

FIELD HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON DISABILITY ASSISTANCE AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

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IS THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS CEMETERY CONSTRUCTION POLICY MEETING THE NEEDS OF TODAY'S VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES?

FRIDAY, MAY 2, 2008

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DISABILITY ASSISTANCE AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 12:00 p.m., in the Board Room, Academy School District 20 Headquarters, 1110 Chapel Hills Drive, Colorado Springs, Colorado, Hon. John J. Hall [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Hall, Lamborn, and Salazar.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN HALL

Mr. HALL. Good afternoon. Thank you for your patience. The Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, Committee on Veterans' Affairs, hearing on "Is the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Cemetery Construction Policy Meeting the Needs of Today's Veterans and Their Families," will now come to order.

I would ask everyone to please rise for the Pledge of Allegiance.

[Pledge of Allegiance.]

Thank you all for coming today. I'm sorry my plane was a little bit delayed, but it's wonderful to be here in Representative Doug Lamborn's district. And we're fortunate to also have Representative Salazar joining us. Without objection, he's been asked to join us on the dais.

The title you've just heard, a long but necessary one, "Is the VA Cemetery Construction Policy Meeting the Needs of Today's Veterans and Their Families," a topic of particular importance to this region and throughout the country.

First a couple of preliminaries. I mentioned Congressman John Salazar, from the 3rd District of Colorado and also a Member of the Committee, who is, by unanimous consent, joining us on the dais. Without objection, so ordered.

And I would also like to recognize Scott Prestige from the office of Congressman Mark Udall from the 2nd District of Colorado, who is in the audience and has a statement, which I will ask, without objection, if we can enter that into the record also.

[The statement of Congressman Udall appears on p. 61.]

So it's a pleasure to be here with all of you and to bring the Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee out into the country and actually see people and have them see and speak to us and see how we operate.

Congressman Lamborn was kind enough to come to the 19th District of New York, where I live, the home of the military academy of West Point and which I am proud to represent. I'm proud and honored also to be in Air Force country, especially since it's not football season. We'll be working on that.

I'm also pleased to know that H.R. 1660, a bill that passed in the House sponsored by Congressman Salazar—that you are also a lead cosponsor.

Mr. LAMBORN. Yes, I am.

Mr. HALL. Both of you sponsored or supported legislation to build a national cemetery in the southern Colorado region, which passed the full House unanimously and now awaits action from the Senate. Mr. Salazar, I know that you, and Ranking Member Lamborn, as well as the rest of the Colorado delegation, have worked on the VA's national cemetery policy concerns in your region on a bipartisan basis. I'm glad we're able to bring this hearing to your State where these issues are front and center.

I also would, parenthetically, tell you that I'm proud that this Subcommittee, and the full VA Committee are, if not the most, certainly among the most bipartisan in the House of Representatives and in the Congress. We occasionally differ on how to pay for things, but we almost always agree on what needs to be done, and that is to take care of America's veterans.

Last preliminaries: In accordance with Committee rules, I ask all cell phones and pagers to be turned off, including mine, as we have a lot of business to conduct in a short period of time and we want to have as few interruptions as possible.

Also, out of respect for our witnesses, I ask for the audience to please refrain from speaking out of order. This is not—I had to tell the folks in my district, too—this is not actually a public hearing. This is a Congressional hearing. We have panels of witnesses scheduled that will take up the time allotted. But I'm sure you can get a few words in with us individually on our way out after the hearing is over if you need to do that.

My thanks to the witnesses for coming today to appear before the Subcommittee. The issues, I know, though pertinent to the cemetery policy at the VA, are of the utmost importance to you, and I look forward to receiving your testimonies.

On a personal note, it is a special privilege for me as Chair of the Subcommittee to conduct it in my Ranking Member's district. Mr. Doug Lamborn, it's been an honor serving with him. Moreover, it's an honor for me to be able to address the issues facing veterans in or nearby their homes.

Although my district, the 19th of New York, is thousands of miles away in the Hudson Valley, beautiful in a different way than the beauty that you see every day here, we share a lot of similarities. We both have one of our Nation's fine military academies, West Point and the Air Force Academy. Also, our district houses many prominent military installations. Both places are ones where

a high percentage of our Nation's veterans call home and return after their service to live most of or sometimes all of their lives.

My mother-in-law still goes to the commissary, as her husband is buried at West Point. So I understand the magnetism that these areas hold for those who graduate from these institutions or serve in these communities. I understand also that southern Colorado is home to one of the largest concentrations of World War II and Vietnam veterans in our country.

Since their genesis on July 17, 1862, national cemeteries have served as the hallowed resting place for our Nation's veterans and their loved ones. Currently, VA operates 125 national cemeteries in 39 States and Puerto Rico and maintains over 2.8 million grave sites. The annual number of burials is on the uprise, with just 36,000 in 1973, up to over 100,200 in 2006. Veterans who have served in this country's armed services are buried in cemeteries operated by the States, the VA, the Department of Interior, Arlington National Cemetery and American Battle Monuments Commission. VA also provides grants to over 69 State veteran cemeteries under its National Cemetery Administration's State Cemetery Grants Program that operates in 35 States, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

We are here today to examine the adequacy of VA's current policy, which entails locating national cemeteries in areas with a large concentration of unserved veterans, and providing reasonable access to a burial option in the national or State veterans cemetery within 75 miles of their residence. As such, VA concludes that new national cemeteries will be established in areas with an unserved veteran population threshold of 170,000 within a 75-mile radius. Under this policy, 83 percent of all veterans are served, the converse of which means that there are at least 17 percent or nearly 2 million veterans and their families who are underserved by this policy.

The Subcommittee also addressed the VA's national cemetery policy issues during a hearing held on May 8, 2007, wherein I expressed concerns of whether this policy was adequate enough to address both rural and urban locations. Those concerns still stand. I also think it's critical that VA makes sure that there's plenty of opportunity for public input during any new cemetery policy or location selection process.

I know that VA is currently conducting its own study of these criteria and has plans to move the percentage of veterans served to 90 percent by fiscal year 2010. I look forward to hearing more about these plans during your testimony.

In the way of follow-up to last year's hearing, I would like to be updated on the current status of the VA's national shrine commitment. Lastly, the Subcommittee has been apprised of a situation at Greenwood Island, the old Camp Jefferson Davis site and the soldiers' asylum home in Pascagoula, Mississippi, where veterans of the Mexican-American War are buried but whose resting places are being eroded by nature and construction. It is reported that some of the coffins and/or bodies have become disinterred and have been found by local fishermen. Whereas I appreciate the National Cemetery Administration's (NCA's) response provided to staff, I would

like to know the NCA implications of this situation, if any, and how we can remedy this grievous oversight.

I now recognize Ranking Member Lamborn for his opening statement.

[The prepared statement of Chairman Hall appears on p. 43.]

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. DOUG LAMBORN

Mr. LAMBORN. Good afternoon. And I would like to personally thank you, Chairman Hall, and your staff for agreeing to hold this hearing. There is a lot of work involved with bringing Congress to southern Colorado, and I appreciate it.

It is an honor to participate in this important occasion. I remember fondly the field hearing this Subcommittee had on veterans disabilities in your Congressional district last year. It was a productive meeting, as this promises to be. I sure enjoyed and learned from the tour of West Point, which also is in your district.

I know you have a very tight schedule, but I hope your plans open up so that you can have that tour of the Air Force Academy I told you about, and I'd love to take you on before you have to go, but if your schedule permits.

I would also like to thank all of the witnesses for being here today. Their statements will be helpful, interesting, informative and deeply moving.

I want to thank my friend, Representative John Salazar for being here. I also want to thank everyone in the audience. You are interested in this issue, and you have come today. We also have students from Aspen Valley High School with us today.

I want to especially thank my friend, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, Bill Tuerk, for joining us here today to discuss the Department of Veterans Affairs policy for the location and construction of new national cemeteries.

This is truly a momentous occasion. There has never before been a field hearing in this Congressional district on this vital subject of a national veterans cemetery. Fortunately, in Under Secretary Tuerk, we have the highest-ranking official within the VA who works on this issue.

Mr. Chairman, property honoring a deceased veteran is one of our most sacred and solemn responsibilities. These patriots have earned a place of honor in our national shrines. Veterans and their families are due the tribute and thanks of a grateful Nation. We should ensure that the final resting place for those who have given so much is accessible to family members and loved ones. This way they can come and pay tribute to the service of those brave men and women who have borne the sacrifice in defense of liberty.

We are seeing increased demand on all of our national cemeteries, especially as members of the greatest generation pass from our presence. VA estimates that interments in national cemeteries will rise from the current level of 2.8 million to 3.2 million by 2012.

VA also estimates that as early as 2016 or as late as 2020, Fort Logan National Cemetery will be at full capacity and they will be looking to construct a replacement cemetery.

Today, Mr. Chairman, we will hear very moving and eloquent testimony from Coloradans who are personally affected by the dis-

tance of the Fort Logan National Cemetery in Denver from the Pikes Peak area.

I believe there is a better way to determine needs than simply drawing circles and a 75-mile radius around a national cemetery to determine where the most underserved veterans are located. There are many other factors that should be taken into account, including travel time to and from national cemeteries, access to public transportation in the area, weather conditions, climate restrictions, and other factors that may affect one part of the country, such as the front range of Colorado more than another.

In addition, VA needs to focus greater attention than ever on demographic trends to determine with increased accuracy where veterans are most likely to live in the future. It is my understanding that the 75-mile rule was created many years ago. We are in the 21st century now, and with the advent of technologies like GPS, it is very easy to determine driving distances and times.

For instance, by doing a simple Google search, I discovered that a veteran from Lake George, Colorado, which is about 60 miles as the crow flies from Fort Logan, must travel 105 miles by road, with a driving time of over 2 hours, not including poor weather or traffic. According to the 75-mile rule, this veteran from Lake George is considered served by Fort Logan. I would venture to say that he is underserved.

This example only points out a flaw within the 75-mile rule and does not take into account the tens of thousands of veterans who live beyond 75-mile radius here in southern Colorado. As this rule, in my opinion anyway, is arbitrary and outdated, I propose that the Department of Veterans Affairs determine a 21st century process for selecting national cemetery sites that takes into account factors in addition to veteran population and straight-line distance.

I would offer my services and those of my staff and even the many willing veterans in this district who have been working on this issue for over a decade now. I believe that with a little hard work we could fine-tune a process that would serve more veterans and hopefully the same or perhaps even a lower cost in VA's current system.

Since bureaucratic hurdles have made it hard for such a processed change to take place, my friend Representative Salazar and I have had to help alert VA to the glaring inequities associated with the current process.

Mr. Chairman, it is for that reason that I was pleased to work with you and Representative Salazar to pass H.R. 1660 with my amendment out of the VA Committee and out of the House last year. This bill would authorize the establishment of a national cemetery in southern Colorado, in El Paso County in particular, and would greatly benefit the veterans and their families in all of southern Colorado. H.R. 1660 represents a major step forward to the campaign to establish a national cemetery, and I urge our colleagues in the Senate to take this bill up as soon as possible.

And Representative Salazar, I'm going to ask you to talk once again with your brother, who as you all may know is one of the U.S. Senators from here in Colorado. I also hope that all of our witnesses understand that when this legislation is enacted, we must always work together to help the National Cemetery Administra-

tion within the VA find a suitable location for this cemetery, and that this would serve the highest number, therefore, of veterans and their families.

I want to thank everyone once again for being here today, and I'm looking forward to the testimony.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

[The prepared statement of Congressman Lamborn appears on p. 44.]

Mr. HALL. Thank you, Mr. Lamborn.

I would now recognize Congressman Salazar for an opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN T. SALAZAR

Mr. SALAZAR. I want to thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, I think that most of you may know John Hall. He's a famous songwriter, with the band Orleans, and wrote the songs, "You're Still the One" and "Dance With Me." We appreciate you coming to Colorado. What do you think about the snow here in the Springs?

Mr. HALL. I wish I would have brought my skis, and I wish I would have had time to use them.

Mr. SALAZAR. I want to thank both you and Ranking Member Lamborn for having this important hearing here in Colorado.

Let me just take a moment, briefly, to thank all of you in the audience who have served this country and your families. The great sacrifice that you've made is the reason that we have the greatest country in the world, in my opinion.

I had the opportunity to serve at the tail end of the Vietnam War. My father was a World War II veteran. My son served two tours right after 9/11. We come from a long line of veterans, and I know the sacrifices that your families have made. What we're about to do here is a monumental task that we have taken on. Mr. Lamborn, I appreciate your hard work. You've truly been a champion on veterans issues, as you have, Mr. Hall.

This legislation that we've been talking about was legislation that Congressman Hefley, Mr. Lamborn's predecessor, had worked on for nearly 15 years, on trying to create a southern Colorado cemetery. We got together earlier this year, Mr. Lamborn and I worked together on trying to provide language that would actually create what we call now the new southern Colorado veterans cemetery.

According to the Congressional Research Service, which is a nonpartisan office that provides research and information to Members of Congress, there are over 150,000 veterans that are making southern Colorado their home.

The residents of southern Colorado have a long, long history of serving in the military. Until recently, Pueblo was America's only city that had four living recipients of the Medal of Honor. Congress realized 15 years ago, and recognized Pueblo, Colorado, America's "Home of Heroes."

During the Vietnam War, almost 10 percent of Colorado soldiers killed in action were from Pueblo. Southern Colorado veterans and their families have been awaiting for an accessible veterans cemetery for far too long. When they pass away, they deserve facilities

that are close to their families. It is wrong to expect a family to have to travel hundreds of miles in some areas to find a final resting place for their loved ones, simply because the current regulations do not take rural areas into account.

I've had the opportunity to visit one of the most beautiful cemeteries that I've ever seen in my life with Under Secretary Tuerk in Georgia. That's the way that we should honor those who have served us.

During the winter months in Colorado, especially in my district where most of it is mountains, the mountain passes are often closed. In fact, in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, just earlier today there was over six inches of snow. All too often, widows have to drive over 700 miles round-trip from Cortez, Colorado, to Fort Logan to see their loved ones.

I was proud to be the author of H.R. 1660 along with Mr. Lamborn, which directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a national cemetery for veterans in southern Colorado. This bill would do several things. It would place a veterans cemetery between Pueblo and Colorado Springs. Mr. Lamborn and I agreed during our discussions that, rightfully so, it should be in El Paso County because we have the largest number of military personnel.

This is not only an Air Force issue, Mr. Chairman. It is also an Army issue. We have Fort Carson right here in El Paso County, just on the south side of Colorado Springs. And I'm a little partial to the Army because I served in the U.S. Army.

The House of Representatives has shown strong support for our bill by adopting it in a unanimous voice vote on May 23, 2007. Veterans in our district, and veterans service organizations agree that a cemetery is critical and that the need will continue to grow. We have information that Fort Logan will probably not be accepting more burials after about 10 years from now. We're getting fairly full there.

In a letter of support, the Military Order of the Purple Heart wrote, "The defenders of our Nation's freedom and their families deserve much better. They deserve a national cemetery located in southern Colorado where they chose to live out their lives. We shouldn't punish those veterans for where they choose to live. The 150,000 veterans serving in Colorado served in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and the Iraq conflicts. They chose to make southern Colorado their home. Our Nation should honor that service by providing them a final resting place."

It is not fair for our Nation to force a widow to drive from Alamosa over 500 miles round-trip or to drive from Cortez over 700 miles round-trip. We're placing a huge burden on the families with the added cost of the trip, and with the high price of fuel right now. National cemeteries are the final act of gratitude that we bestow upon those who served our Nation. They give families comfort and inspire future generations by preserving the memory of our heroes that are no longer with us.

I look forward to hearing from my colleagues and the experts here with us today, on the current regulations and how we can better improve them to serve more veterans, especially those in rural areas.

It is my understanding under the current regulations, that there would never be another cemetery built in a rural area, and actually in many States that are sparsely populated, western States such as Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado, because of sparse population.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to thank you for having this hearing here today.

And I want to welcome our guests. I appreciate your being here to testify.

Mr. HALL. Thank you, Congressman Salazar.

I ask unanimous consent that the opening statement of Congressman Udall from the Second District of Colorado be accepted into the record. Without objection, so ordered.

Welcome to our panelists. Before we move to the first panel, I wanted to—in case you're curious who you're looking at, there are staff who I also want to thank from both sides of the aisle here on the dais. We have majority Staff Director and Counsel of the Subcommittee, Kimberly Ross, and Minority Staff, Jon Clark. Thank you to our stenographers and recordkeepers, without which this would not be an official hearing.

All panelists, I would like to remind you that your complete written statements have been made a part of the hearing record. So please limit your remarks so that we may have sufficient time to follow up with questions, once everyone has had the opportunity to provide testimony.

Joining us on our first panel is Linda Lee-Witt, President of the Gold Star Widows, and Milly Briseno, an Iraq war widow.

Thank you and welcome to the table, please.

Excuse me—Past Secretary of Gold Star Widows.

Ms. LEE-WITT. I still have to correct you, Mr. Chairman. I am a member of the Gold Star Wives of America, and I am a Past Secretary for the local chapter.

Mr. HALL. Past Secretary of the local chapter and member of the Gold Star Wives of America. Thank you. It's an honor to have you before us today. And, Ms. Lee-Witt, you are now recognized for 5 minutes. Speak into the microphone, and make sure it's turned on, please.

STATEMENTS OF LINDA LEE-WITT, PETERSON AFB, COLORADO SPRINGS, CO, MEMBER, GOLD STAR WIVES OF AMERICA; AND MILLY BRISENO, CO-FOUNDER, COLORADO MILITARY SURVIVORS, COLORADO SPRINGS, CO (IRAQ WAR WIDOW)

STATEMENT OF LINDA LEE-WITT

Ms. LEE-WITT. Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, distinguished Members of the Committee. I want to thank you for the opportunity to be here today. My name is Linda Lee-Witt. I am a member of the Gold Star Wives of America and the Administrative Officer of the Retiree Activities Office of Southern Colorado, in the 21st space wing, Peterson Air Force Base, Colorado Springs. My testimony, however, today will be my story as a widow of a veteran.

My husband, Robert, grew up in a military family. His father served during World War II and retired as a major from the Army. As a child, Bob lived and went to school all over the world. Like

his father, he dedicated his whole career to the U.S. Government. He served with the United States Air Force and in Vietnam. After retiring from the Air Force in 1978, he continued to serve his country in civil service, in safety engineering at Fort Carson here in Colorado Springs, where he deployed with the troops wherever they went.

His passion for the safety of the young soldiers was deep, and he identified with what they and their families faced every day.

He died from a service-connected cancer on November 3, 2004, in our home. Due to the weather conditions, which you all saw yesterday. We had a blizzard early in November, and our driveway has a steep incline. Due to that, when the mortuary van came, they couldn't get up the driveway to take my husband's body down to the van, and our son had to put his father's body in a four-wheel drive to take down to the mortuary van.

I wanted my husband to be buried with the full honor and respect that he so deserved, and for months I kept his ashes, not wanting them in a civilian cemetery. Eventually, to my regret now, I chose to have his remains buried at the National Veterans Cemetery in Nashville, Tennessee. His parents are buried there. All of my children are here. My grandchildren are here. Had there been an appropriate cemetery in El Paso County, without question I would have had his remains here.

We weren't a part of the military community at that time. It was civil service, and he'd been retired from civil service. So I had really never heard of Fort Logan, and it sounds maybe a little bit strange, but I thought Fort Logan was a town somewhere. I didn't know about Fort Logan being a military cemetery, a veterans cemetery. Together as a family, probably we will never be able to coordinate a trip together to Tennessee to visit my husband's grave.

I would love for my grandchildren to see how this country honors our veterans, when they pass. I'd love for them to see the hundreds of headstones, their grandfather's among them, and know the freedoms and the rights that they have today are because of the men and women like their grandfather who were willing to give their lives for those freedoms.

Working with the wives of servicemembers in the World War II and Vietnam era, they express how hard it is to make the trip to Denver. Some of them with their advanced age, many are unable or afraid to drive themselves and they have to ask someone to take them. Talking with young widows of today's war, the hardship for them is to take the whole day with young children and visit their husband's graves.

The logistics involved getting to Fort Logan are trying, and many families have a hard time finding Fort Logan, from what I understand. Because of the sporadic unpredictable climate here in El Paso County, from late spring to fall, I–25 is often impassable. Monument Hill, just north of town, can be treacherous.

For the widow, visiting the grave site is one of the most important elements in the grieving process. And those first months, the loss and the feeling of aloneness is almost like fear. Visiting the grave is a way for us—some of us to connect to our spouse. Eventually, an acceptance of the fact that they're no longer here. For the

children, it's seeing that their parent was given a place of honor, a resting place of honor.

As with my husband, many of our service men and women and their families opt to stay and live in Colorado Springs after their military service. We have a huge military presence in Colorado Springs and it's rapidly growing, yet we have no national veterans cemetery to accommodate them when they're put to rest. El Paso County's need for a national cemetery is vital to the health and well-being of our widows, the dependents and our community.

It's my hope that based on the hardships endured by the military widows and families in the southern Colorado area and the large military presence here, that the VA would grant El Paso County a national veterans cemetery.

Congressman Lamborn, I'd like to thank you for arranging this today, and thank you, too, to your staff for the support you give the military.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Lee-Witt appears on p. 45.]

Mr. HALL. Thank you, Ms. Lee-Witt.

Ms. Briseno, you are now recognized for your opening statement.

STATEMENT OF MILLY BRISENO

Ms. BRISENO. Thank you so much for taking the time out to hear about our experiences as younger widows.

At the height of my husband's 17-year Army career and in the 13th year of our marriage, our life came to screeching halt. An unexpected massive stoke at the age of 35 took his vibrant life from this temporary home and left my three children and me reeling as we struggled for direction and purpose in this completely unfamiliar world of loss. My husband's death was not combat-related, but from natural causes.

My husband's untimely death came just 1 month after moving to Fort Carson. As a young family full of promise and a bright future, we never thought to discuss burial plans. I really struggled to know how to honor his life as a dedicated soldier, whose career in the Army Medical Specialist Corps demonstrated his commitment and the restoration and preservation of life.

To honor him and affirm my family's identity as a military family, we chose to bury my husband at a national cemetery. We chose Fort Logan. Fort Logan was the closest one to our home and my in-laws' home. It has been difficult to visit his grave site, for many reasons. We really do want to visit more. My family and my in-laws reside in Colorado Springs, near Fort Carson. The travel distance to such a congested metropolitan area poses great inconveniences from my young family. At the time of my husband's death, my children were 9, 5, and 2½ years old. A trip to Fort Logan involves an entire day's plans. It is quite challenging at times for the children.

With the weather here in Colorado, we mainly make it to Fort Logan, at the most, two times per year. We miss most of our significant special occasions, such as birthdays, anniversaries and other holidays, because they occur in the fall and winter seasons. As a family, we try to set a goal to get to Fort Logan, at least for Memorial Day. The effects of limited visits to Fort Carson have had an impact in these first 3 years of grief, not only for my immediate

family, but also for my mother and father-in-law, my husband's sisters and their families who reside in Colorado Springs.

Our family has had less participation in commemorative events, which occur at Fort Logan. We have less opportunities to connect with the military's sensitive and supportive community, which can be found among the visitors at Fort Logan. My family may miss out on one way to continually affirm their military identity. And personally, I myself have struggled with having less access to an acceptable place to face the reality of grief and process those complicated emotions.

It is difficult to deal with grief as a younger widow with young children. Through my involvement with Colorado military survivors, I have found that a new generation of widows are emerging. This new group of widows faces additional struggles in dealing with grief because we do not fit the common stereotype. I attend a widows' support group at Fort Carson, which averages from five to eight participants, and we meet twice a month.

Up until recently, I was the oldest one by at least a decade. We are finding that we must find a safe place to face our grief, one in which we have opportunities to express our emotions of loss and pain. That is why we gather together, and that is why I wish we were closer to Fort Logan. The small plot of land that I stake claim to in Denver holds a vital place in my ability to process my grief. My husband's headstone is an immovable reminder that forces me to face the heartache involved in the unexpected ending of his earthly story.

His headstone solemnly stands among thousands of its kind at Fort Logan. To most, these pale stones represent so much pain and suffering. But to me, they each hold a story. They are just like a sea of bookends. The dates engraved on my husband's headstone tell the beginning and the finale of his life. His headstone is a fixed mark that causes me to focus on the finale, and the heartache.

A cemetery is an acceptable place in our society to express one's grief. Young widows find very few acceptable places to deal with their loss. With now almost 3 years of learning in the obstacle course of grief, I realize the necessity of exercising this heartache. It has taken me a long time to come to the understanding that heartache is strength training. It helps transform the weakness of my faith into a powerful conditioned response to my loss. Once only heartache, pierced through with fear, now has become thanksgiving that appreciates the work of sorrow.

Military loss is more complex. It is a traumatic loss, especially for young families that face this sudden tragedy. Our society still puts expectations on grief recovery. Because of the traumatic grief that military families endure, their bereavement is prolonged and can be more difficult. It is a lifelong process to learn to move forward with one's grief. As an organization, Colorado military survivors strives to unite survivors in their loss, and help them find strength in a community well acquainted with sorrow.

My initial connection with one of my dear friends now, also a young widow with two young children, was made at Fort Logan when I discovered that her husband was buried just two rows away from mine. Together we face each day encouraging each other to

press on, to remember to have faith in God, and to grow through our grief in order to help one another.

If we were able to be closer to a place that would help us face these challenges with greater strength, we could be more effective in encouraging a new generation of grieving families. We could accomplish this by affirming their value and assuring them of the honored place of appreciation that their loved ones' treasured stories hold in our community.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Briseno appears on p. 46.]

Mr. HALL. Thank you, Ms. Briseno and Ms. Lee-Witt.

You each have a bottle of water in front of you that you may open and drink if you'd like, courtesy of the Subcommittee. I will just ask a couple questions, and then try and leave more time for our Colorado Representatives to ask theirs.

Ms. Lee-Witt, first, let me express my sympathy to you and also Ms. Briseno, and my thanks for your gift to our country and for your loved ones, your husband's gift to our country, and blessings on you and them. Also thank you for coming here and for having the fortitude to come and tell us your story.

I know the national cemetery policy is complicated, and that the problems that you described exist in many locations, including my home State of New York. But, Ms. Lee-Witt, can you tell me more about what you and your organization have done to bring a national cemetery to Colorado, and the response to those efforts? Please use the microphone.

Ms. LEE-WITT. As far as Gold Star Wives, Rose Lee is a gold star wife, she is on this very Committee in DC. Locally, here, we don't really have a group that meets. We donate to the NALP organization. It's a non-profit organization. The widows who are involved in the government in Washington, D.C., really do a lot there and testify on behalf of military widows. I think Rose Lee was just in Florida for this very—this very discussion on the cemeteries. So that's what the Gold Star Wives do.

As far as what I do with the Retired Activities Office, I try to help widows and retirees. I'm in contact with them and help direct them to the people that they need to meet to get what they should have in benefits and support. I didn't know a lot of this, of course, again, until after my husband died. So Gold Star Wives is active in this very thing, right here in the Springs, and at the base, we help the retirees.

Mr. HALL. Well, thank you. And of course, thanks for the work that the Gold Star Wives do. We see Ms. Lee very frequently in Washington.

Ms. Briseno, you mentioned in your testimony the personal struggle of having to travel long distances to visit your loved one, and I want to thank you for sharing a rather poetic testimony with us, of how you've had to endure this journey and this tremendous inconvenience. It's a journey, not only a physical one, but an emotional and spiritual one as well.

In terms of the future, can you describe how an additional cemetery in the region would assist others who may face the same issues?

Ms. BRISENO. Well, as an organization, Colorado Military Survivors, is a new non-profit here in Colorado Springs. We have encountered many new surviving families in this area. And our hope is to advocate for those that need to be closer in order to process their grief. And I think my experience with widows and family members in this area show that we're—we're coming to the understanding that it's important to be closer, to face the challenges, especially as younger widows.

We have additional challenges, with the complications of losing our loved one, that was active duty especially. I think that families, we can encourage families and support them in their grieving process and to continue to move on and show how much we appreciate what they've done by giving them access to a place that they can move forward in their grief.

Mr. HALL. Thank you very much.

Mr. Lamborn, you're now recognized for questions.

Mr. LAMBORN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you both for your eloquent and moving testimony.

Ms. Briseno, you mentioned that your family tries to go to Fort Logan at least on Memorial Day, if not more often. Can you ever think of examples with yourself, or other people that you worked with through the Military Survivors Organization that you're working so much with, where trips have had to be postponed or canceled because of this changeable weather?

The weather we have here today and yesterday is a perfect example of how our volatile weather can change plans.

Ms. BRISENO. Well, personally, my husband died on September 28, 2005. Our 14th wedding anniversary was November 30th. I was bound and determined, because it takes a while to get the permanent headstone up, I had gotten word that his headstone had been placed. So I had not visited Fort Logan since his interment on the 28th of September, and that—the day before, it was predicted that there was going to be snow.

My family and I were living with my in-laws. And my mother-in-law was terrified that I was going to try and make it up there the next day, because I was bound and determined to visit his grave on our anniversary. And due to the weather, and also a little minor accident with my daughter at school on the day of our anniversary, I decided it was probably not a good day to go. And my mother-in-law was quite relieved that I did not try and trek up there by myself. I insisted on going by myself, because it was that personal time that you need and don't want to show it in front of everybody.

And I think that that—I decided not to go that day. So I had to decide other ways to commemorate the day, without going to his grave site. So that postponed my first visit.

Mr. LAMBORN. Thank you.

And for either one of you, you talked about a mother with small children. On the other end of the scale, someone, a widow or widower for that matter who is elderly, do you know of special needs there that might make it difficult to go from this part of the State to Fort Logan.

Ms. LEE-WITT. Well, I deal with a lot of the older widows, Vietnam and World War II era. And many of them are in walkers.

They are afraid to drive in a metropolitan area. They hate going over Monument Hill. We have a lot of accidents on Monument Hill. A lot of them are too sick to drive or they're too afraid to drive anywhere but their little neighborhoods.

So for them, yes, they have to depend on someone else if they're going to go. I hate to—I'm not that old, but I hate to drive in Denver too. So, yes, that's a big issue with the older widows, and a lot of them have their spouses at Fort Logan.

Mr. LAMBORN. Thank you both.

Mr. HALL. Thanks, Mr. Lamborn.

Mr. Salazar.

Mr. SALAZAR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

That was very moving testimony, and my heart goes out to you and your families.

The legislation that we currently have in the House, actually, is stuck in the Senate, does several things.

First of all, it establishes a national cemetery in the southern Colorado region, and also requires the Secretary to establish a national cemetery in this county, in El Paso County. It requires the Secretary to consult with State and local officials as to the site selection, and it requires a Secretary to consult with government officials in the site selection. It authorizes the Secretary to accept the gift of an appropriate parcel of real estate to be used for the cemetery, and it requires the Secretary to submit to Congress a report on the establishment of the cemetery.

It requires the Secretary to add the cemetery to the current list of priority projects. As you know, there are six cemeteries on the priority list. This will not circumvent any of those. It falls in line, it would be number seven. Under Secretary Tuerk, I hope, he agrees with that.

It does not allow the cemetery to take priority over any of these current projects. Do you have any objections to any of these proposals, and would you have any objections if the cemetery was selected closer to the Pueblo line, as it might be able to serve more veterans and would cover a greater geographical area that would serve veterans in southeast and southwest Colorado. Would either one of you or both of you address that?

Ms. LEE-WITT. Since Fort Carson is the—where they're expanding so much, the southern part of El Paso County would be fine with me, and between Pueblo and the Springs, I think would be appropriate. I think if it's in Pueblo or south of there, it's going to still be just as hard for the El Paso County widows and families.

Mr. SALAZAR. This does designate that El Paso County will be the home.

Ms. LEE-WITT. Okay.

Mr. SALAZAR. We wanted to try to move it closer to the Pueblo County line, still in the El Paso County so that it would be able to serve more veterans, and I think that maybe we could find an appropriate gift of land in that area.

Ms. LEE-WITT. I wouldn't have any objection to that, as long as it's not going over Monument Hill or having to be the——

Mr. SALAZAR. It's warmer down south.

Ms. BRISENO. I think traveling aspect, that's probably the main concern, is that it would be accessible, even if the weather was a

bit rough, just because—and then being less congested. It was hard to find Fort Logan the first time I went, and I think it would be easier for families that have even more complications in travelling, any families of any age, because it would be more accessible, and probably a calmer, quieter place for one to face their grief.

Mr. SALAZAR. Would either one of you possibly think of disinterring the remains of your loved ones, and if we had an actual cemetery close by, bring the remains to this area?

Ms. LEE-WITT. I would definitely consider that for my family.

Ms. BRISENO. When I talked with my in-laws, my father and mother-in-law, my sister-in-laws, even with my children, my oldest one being 12, that was everybody's first question, is whether we would do that. And I think for my in-laws, because of being parents and facing additional health issues and concerns, travel is hard for them. And we know several families in the Pueblo area of parents that, due to their age, it makes it difficult. And so that was the concern of my in-laws was if they would—if that would be a possibility for our family.

Mr. SALAZAR. Thank you both very much. Thank you for your sacrifice.

Ms. LEE-WITT. I'd like to add to that too. I did say that all my children and grandchildren are here now, and because my husband's body is in Tennessee, that also is where I will be buried. And that would be a hardship, at that point, for all of my family. So I would definitely consider that.

Mr. SALAZAR. Thank you.

Mr. HALL. Thank you, Ms. Lee-Witt and Ms. Briseno. And having spent a bit of my life making music in Tennessee, I can tell you that Nashville is a wonderful town. I would encourage you, if circumstances allow, to make the trip. Thanks again for your testimony, and you're now excused.

We will call our second panel: Mr. Victor Fernandez, Co-Founder of the Pikes Peak Veterans Cemetery Committee; Mr. Bud Sailar, Director of El Paso County Board of Veterans; Mr. C. Douglas Sterner, Former Chairman of the Colorado State Board of Veterans Affairs; and Mr. Jeff Chostner, Pueblo County Commissioner; and Tim Grabin, Department Commander of the American Legion.

As before, your written statements are in the record. So feel free to confine yourselves to 5 minutes. The yellow light means 4 minutes, and the red light means 5.

So, Mr. Fernandez, you are now recognized.

STATEMENTS OF VICTOR M. FERNANDEZ, MEMBER, PIKES PEAK VETERANS CEMETERY COMMITTEE, COLORADO SPRINGS, CO; BUD SAILAR, DIRECTOR, EL PASO COUNTY, CO, VETERAN AND MILITARY AFFAIRS; TIM GRABIN, DEPARTMENT COMMANDER, DEPARTMENT OF COLORADO, AMERICAN LEGION; C. DOUGLAS STERNER, PAST CHAIRMAN, COLORADO STATE BOARD OF VETERANS AFFAIRS; AND HON. JEFF CHOSTNER, COLONEL, USAF (RET.), COMMISSIONER, PUEBLO COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS, PUEBLO, CO

STATEMENT OF VICTOR M. FERNANDEZ

Mr. FERNANDEZ. Good afternoon. I'm Vic Fernandez, and I'm West Point Class 1959, and I was born in Trinidad, Colorado, where my World War II veteran father was intered—or is intered. I am a member of the Pikes Peak Veterans Cemetery Committee. Thank you very much for coming to Colorado to hear our message.

I'll cover three issues. First, why we need a new national veterans cemetery in Colorado. Second, why it should be established in the Pikes Peak region. And third, what we have done to assure that it is established here.

Regarding the first issue, Fort Logan in Denver, the State's major national veterans cemetery is expected to reach capacity about 2020. Fort Logan National Cemetery is landlocked in a residential area of Denver and cannot be expanded. Because of the size, geography, and weather patterns of the State of Colorado, the State's other small, remotely located cemeteries do not offer reasonable service to Denver or the Pikes Peak region. Those are reasons why it should be in the Pikes Peak region, and that's all southern Colorado.

First, the large veteran population of the Pikes Peak region has not been properly served by Fort Logan. Fort Logan is located in a difficult to find residential section of a major metropolitan area, with poor access from interstate and/or other highways. This has resulted in surviving spouses and families from southern Colorado making the trip to visit the loved one, but failing to find the cemetery.

Second, in winter, it is especially difficult to get to Denver over the topography of Monument Hill and through the weather patterns of what we call the Palmer Divide. Those topographic and weather pattern's hindrances make the Veterans Administration's internal 75-mile rule a useless tool in the State of Colorado, resulting in unsatisfactory service to veterans and their families in southern Colorado.

Third, the Pikes Peak region, with its rapidly growing six military installations is producing veterans at a much faster rate than the remainder of the State of Colorado. Many local military complete their service and remain in this area. Additionally, hundreds of our local military have given their lives during the global war on terror, and were buried in our local cemeteries, these active duty Americans need to be counted and properly served by a local national veterans cemetery.

And finally, the service life of Fort Logan can be lengthened for the veterans of Denver in the northern—in northern Colorado if the Pikes Peak cemetery is established and opens soon.

So what have we done to assure that a national cemetery is established in the Pikes Peak region? My colleagues and I have worked for the establishment of this cemetery for over 10 years. Politically, we have solicited and received the backing of past, as was mentioned, and present Members of Congress. We have the backing of all of the Colorado contingent in the Congress of the United States. We have the backing of county commissioners and city councils from several counties and cities in southern Colorado, including Pueblo and Colorado Springs. We are supported by all of the veterans organizations in the surrounding counties, and the United Veterans Council of Colorado, Committee of Colorado.

We have made several contacts with and have carried on letter-writing campaigns to the Secretaries of Veterans Affairs for over these past 10 years. To date, we do not consider any of the responses to have been satisfactory.

We studied the VA regulations. We performed due diligence studies. We have written a comprehensive plan, and that plan is entitled, "A National Veterans Cemetery for the Pikes Peak Region." This is that plan.

I will give a copy of this to each of you. The plan contains color maps, the photos of 10 most viable low and no-cost undeveloped sites between Colorado Springs and Pueblo, and a matrix that we use to rank these 10 sites.

In conclusion, in order to provide sufficient burial space for Colorado's veterans in the future, and to fairly meet the needs of southern Colorado's veterans, plans for Pikes Peak Veterans Cemetery must get under way immediately, and we are prepared to help.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Fernandez appears on p. 47.]

Mr. HALL. Thank you, sir. And, without objection, I will ask that the report you're giving us be entered into the record of this hearing.

[The report entitled, "A National Veterans Cemetery for the Pikes Peak Region," appears on p. 63.]

Mr. HALL. Mr. Sailar.

STATEMENT OF BUD SAILAR

Mr. SAILAR. Good afternoon, Congressman. My name is Bud Sailar, and I am the Director of El Paso County Veteran Military Affairs Office. I thank you for the opportunity to testify and present the views of our local veterans and their concerns. Like many, we consider the national cemeteries as memorials to veterans who preserved our freedom.

The future veteran demographics of Colorado will show that the Pikes Peak region, with its military installations, are producing veterans at a much faster rate than the remainder of Colorado. Fort Carson, which is the most popular station of choice, is alone on track to go to a population of over 30,000 soldiers, not counting their spouses. And when many, if not most of these local military complete their service, they remain in the area, which further accelerates the growth of the veteran population here. We also find

that a large number of military, who were once stationed here, return here after military retirement. In short, our veteran population is growing at a much faster rate than the remainder of Colorado.

I myself am a native of Pennsylvania. And when I completed my service at the Air Force Academy, I chose to stay here. And my family's here, and I've had 26 years living in this area.

Additionally, we find that it is interesting and very disappointing that our large active duty military population is not counted in the veteran population numbers used to determine population served by national cemeteries. Presently, over 100 burials per week take place at Fort Logan. During the next 22 years, according to VA data, there will be an additional 40,000 veterans in southern Colorado. Many of these will not be honored in the national cemetery because, in that same 22-year period, over 90,000 veterans will be buried at Fort Logan. This will more than tax the cemetery usage.

One of the things that I find really disappointing, or disheartening is in talking to surviving spouses, I find that a lot of the surviving spouses have their spouses' remains in urns on a shelf in their home.

I recently spoke to one widow, and Ms. Witt referred to it earlier, that she did not want to have her family or her husband buried at Fort Logan because of her age, and that she could not travel there. And it makes it very difficult on those individuals.

So it is really disheartening to our staff that we see so many surviving spouses that have to hold their loved one's remains instead of being able to make a decision right away, and alleviate some of the pain that they have because they've already lost the loved one.

Mr. Chairman, I wish you and Under Secretary Tuerk could have arrived in Denver yesterday morning and traveled down I–25. You would have had a perfect example of the weather conditions here and what families have to put up with. And it would have been a firsthand experience seeing what was going on.

And again, we thank you for coming here. We feel this is a very important issue, and that it really needs addressing, especially in thanking the numbers of veterans and their families that have served this country, and especially the numbers of the younger veterans that we're losing because of the war on terror.

Thank you, sir.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Sailar appears on p. 49.]

Mr. HALL. Thank you, Mr. Sailar. I can tell you that Under Secretary Tuerk did, in fact, arrive yesterday. I chickened out. But he tells us that he made the drive and it was truly awful and dangerous. You'll hear from him in a little while, but thank you for your testimony.

Mr. Grabin, you're recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF TIM GRABIN

Mr. GRABIN. Mr. Chairman, Members of Subcommittee, Honorable Congressmen John Hall, Doug Lamborn and John Salazar, I am a native. My name is Tim Grabin, the Department Commander of the Colorado American Legion. I am a native of Canon City, Colorado, which is southern Colorado, a long history of family who have honorably served over many generations.

During Word War II, I lost an uncle who was killed in action, and he is buried there in Canon City, and perhaps that is the reason he is buried there rather than Fort Logan due to some of the transportation situations and crossing the mountains. It is some complication.

I would like to thank you for allowing the American Legion, the Department of Colorado, to present its views on the VA cemetery construction policy. I've endorsed a copy of the resolution adopted by our National organization. As part of my written testimony, this remains our current position on burial allowances. Burial plots, allowances and establishment of additional, national and State cemeteries.

I would like to concentrate my remarks on the need for additional cemetery space in Colorado. And hopefully, in the Colorado Springs area, serving veterans in southern parts of Colorado and other areas. Colorado continues to grow, and new veterans and their families are a part of that growth. Historically, because of numerous military establishments in the southern Colorado area, veterans return to Colorado, making Colorado their new home because of climate, environment, and strong military support systems in place. With the new veterans population growth, will come the need for new cemeteries.

Space for southern Colorado area is the perfect place for a new cemetery. As the Department Commander of the American Legion, I would like to put our organization on record as favoring the establishment of a new—a brand new cemetery in southern Colorado. And we would not favor the Fort Logan satellite concept.

For instance, during our winters in Colorado, on many occasions Colorado Springs is separated and isolated from Denver because of inclement weather on Monument Hill. To count on Fort Logan establishment to provide support services during those times would possibly delay counsel, the services for those being intered. All support services must be co-located within the new cemetery. We are adamant that the location of the south of Monument Hill and located so that the maximum number of veterans be served.

We want to thank the Subcommittee for the opportunity to express our views. We want to continue to be a part of the discussion and decisionmaking. We stand ready, as an organization of over 2.7 million veterans, nationwide, to put our strong voice behind the efforts.

Thank you for the privilege to serve here today for veterans on this day.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Grabin appears on p. 50.]

Mr. HALL. Thank you, Mr. Grabin.

Mr. Sterner, you're recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF C. DOUGLAS STERNER

Mr. STERNER. Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity.

On February 4, 1945, during the Battle of the Bulge, Army Private Harold D. Hissong was killed in action. On learning of his death half a world away in the small town of Somers, Montana, his mother, Florence Hissong planted a tree at the front entrance of her home, overlooking Flathead Lake. Five years later, I was born

in nearby Kalispell. And in many ways, I grew up alongside that tree, for I could not miss it every time I visited my grandmother.

As a growing boy, each time I saw it, it stood as a reminder, not only of the uncle that I never knew, but of the great price of freedom, of the responsibility passed on to every generation to answer its own call of duty. And when my day came, I understood my obligation was privileged to serve my Nation through two tours of duty in Vietnam. I was in no small part inspired by the lessons learned from a tree planted in honor of a World War II hero.

Mr. HALL. Excuse me, Mr. Sterner. Is your microphone on? Is there a switch? Why don't you switch with Mr. Grabin? Thank you. I'm sorry to interrupt you.

Mr. STERNER. Thank you. I am—from good to worse.

Mr. HALL. Whoever has the knob, turn it down a little bit and we'll be fine.

Mr. STERNER. I have come to learn and understand that memorials are not about those who went before us. Rather, memorials stand as an example as a beacon to inspire and guide future generations of Americans.

The location of our veterans cemeteries is not so much about the convenience with which we place our dead, as it is about the convenience that we offer to the families who have lost a loved one, and are reminded and inspired by the monuments to their selfless service.

The ethos of a warrior states, "I will never leave a comrade behind." And no matter where in the world a young man or woman falls in service to their country, they know that their comrades will do everything in their power to see that they are returned home. This ethos is not predicated upon policies established within constraints of budgets and convenience. It is a solemn obligation to those who've served and have sacrificed. As a nation, we have no less a solemn obligation to ensure that the final resting place of our veterans be in close proximity to their home.

Fifteen years ago, my hometown of Pueblo, Colorado, was recognized by the U.S. Congress as America's Home of Heroes due to the fact that it was the only city in America with four sons who are living recipients of the medal of honor. It should not be surprising that Pueblo would produce four such heroes over three different wars in a span of only 24 years. Pueblo is Home of Heroes because of these four, but also because of thousands others like them who have served with pride and patriotism.

In the 2000 census, Pueblo numbered among the top 254 largest cities in America, number five with the largest percentage of World War II veterans. Such dedication to service is endemic to our community, and our community believes strongly in duty, honor and country.

Eight years ago, two of our hometown heroes died within months of each other. Bill Crawford, who earned the Medal of Honor in World War II was buried at the U.S. Air Force Academy. Carl Sitter, Bill's high school classmate who earned a Silver Star in World War II and the Medal of Honor in Korea was buried at Arlington National Cemetery. On April 6, 2007, Jerry Murphy passed away, the third Puebloan in less than 10 years to earn the Medal of Honor when he received it for his actions in Korea. Although fu-

neral services were held in his hometown, he was subsequently transported far south to Santa Fe National Cemetery for burial.

You see, there exists today no veterans cemetery within 90 miles of Pueblo that ensures that Mr. Murphy, or for that matter, Mr. Crawford or Mr. Sitter could have returned home for their final journey. Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, the VA cemetery construction policy failed these three distinguished heroes of my hometown, as well as the people of Pueblo who remembered them fondly. It continues to fail the families of our city of 100,000 citizens, comprising one of the highest percentages of World War II veterans in the Nation, and in fact a uniquely high percentage of veterans of all recent wars who must travel more than 100 miles and navigate the traffic of metropolitan Denver just to pay respect to their loved ones buried at Fort Logan.

Please consider the needs of our city as well as the entire southern Colorado region, remembering our obligation as a Nation to our veterans and to their families, and provide the much needed national cemetery in our area so our heroes will rest in peace and dignity where they belong: at home in southern Colorado.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Sterner appears on p. 51.]

Mr. HALL. Thank you, Mr. Sterner.

Colonel Chostner.

STATEMENT OF HON. JEFF CHOSTNER, COLONEL, USAF (RET.)

Colonel CHOSTNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Congressman Lamborn and Congressman Salazar for having us here today. I've been involved with this matter since 2003 as a former member of the Pueblo Colorado City Council, as Chairman of the Greater Pueblo Chamber of Commerce Military Affairs Committee, as President of the Air Force Association, Mel Harmon Chapter, and the American Legion. I served 22 years on active duty. I retired as a colonel in the United States Air Force, and I'm currently a Pueblo County Commissioner.

This matter is near and dear to my heart, and I'm sure to my other colleagues because we've had other friends who have fallen in combat. And we need to dedicate their service to this country in an appropriate way where we can lay their remains.

In April 1986, I was promoted to the grade of major with my fellow Mayor, Fernando Ribbas Dominici. Two weeks later, he was killed over the skies of Tripoli as the last 111 that went in over that particular city. In 1991, my wing deployed during operation Desert Storm, the Island of Diego Garcia. My wing, the 92nd bomb wing, was the only wing to lose a B52 during combat, and I lost friends on that particular aircraft as well.

It's my view that it is imperative that a new veterans cemetery be established in southern Colorado. And by that, I mean in a location south of the city of Colorado Springs. As you know, the closest veterans cemetery is Fort Logan National Cemetery. It's located in the Denver metro area. It's a fine facility, and one of which we're all proud. I have two relatives who lay in that cemetery.

However, it's my understanding that Fort Logan is nearing capacity, and there's a pressing need to establish another veterans cemetery, either as an adjunct of Fort Logan, or as a new cemetery.

I've also been informed that there are different Veterans Administration regulations, based on the status of the cemetery.

Under either criteria, however, we were dismayed to learn that the Veterans Administration has recommended a veterans cemetery between Colorado Springs and Denver. None of the participants to the discussions that I've been involved with over the last 5 years ever envisioned a cemetery north of Colorado Springs. All believe it should be south of Colorado Springs.

I would urge that you review the current Veterans Administration regulations regarding status of veterans cemeteries and how said cemeteries define the geographical area in which they may be placed. In my view, the current regulations do not sufficiently take into account location of other existing veteran cemeteries, and the ability of other concentrations of veterans to avail themselves of the right to burial in the national cemetery.

This discrepancy is most apparent in the matter before your Subcommittee, in that, as Mr. Sterner mentioned, the next closest veterans cemetery is Santa Fe, New Mexico.

If you dealt just strictly in geographical terms, a new cemetery should probably be close to Trinidad, Colorado, but given the concentration of the veterans, we all came to a consensus that it should be at a location south of Colorado Springs.

Yet, instead of proposing a cemetery that would either be more geographically central to the area or closer for other veterans in the region, the Veterans Administration recommends a new cemetery in close proximity to the existing one. While it will provide more capacity, it does not allow more convenience or availability to the region's veterans or their families.

I appreciate the ability to speak before you today, and I would urge that you alter the regulations. Thank you very much.

And, Congressman Salazar, as a fellow veteran, I would also thank you for your service to the United States.

[The prepared statement of Colonel Chostner appears on p. 59.]

Mr. HALL. Thank you, Colonel Chostner.

Thank you all for your testimony, for your service to our country, and for your service to our veterans.

Mr. Fernandez, I'll start off by asking you, in your testimony, you showed us and told us about the plan in National Veterans Cemetery for the Pikes Peak region, which we've entered into the record here.

Have you received any feedback on this plan, and do you think plans such as yours would serve as a good example for the creation of future veterans cemeteries in other locations?

Mr. FERNANDEZ. Yes, sir, we have received feedback on it. We've received feedback from both Senators' offices, Senator Salazar and Senator Allard. We have received feedback from Congressman Salazar, of course Congressman Lamborn, and you received testimony today from Congressman Udall. He is also back. Several others have said that.

This sort of a thing actually didn't come about by accident. My second career, after I finished playing soldier, was as an urban planner. And I realize the importance of urban planning to get anything done. We—I reached out to a fellow that I had worked with.

His name is George Calhoun. He's a retired West Point officer, class of 1954, and he was the actual author of this.

We on the Committee provided the data, photographs and maps that he would need to produce this document, and it was produced therefore by him, approved after some slight modifications by the Committee. It does have 10 sites, and those 10 sites are in the County—we have one site in Pueblo County, one site in Fremont County and the others are in El Paso County, and they are all between Colorado Springs and Pueblo, with the exception of one site that is east of Colorado Springs, near Schriever Air Force Base. That particular site was offered early on, and it is a good site, but doesn't meet the between the cities kind of thing.

Mr. HALL. Thank you, sir. I have 5 minutes total.

Mr. SALAZAR. Mr. Chairman, may I request that this booklet be handed out so that we can look at those?

Mr. HALL. Sure, that would be great. Thank you so much.

We'll read the report and get back to you with more questions. Thank you for your response.

Also, I wanted to ask Mr. Sailar, in your testimony, you mentioned that 400 active duty servicemembers who were stationed in Colorado have died serving this Nation over the last several years, but some were buried in their hometowns.

Can you tell the Subcommittee why these veterans should be counted in the numbers for a local cemetery?

Mr. SAILAR. Because, sir, they have become a large part of this community and this county, and a lot of these veterans that were buried in other areas not only lost their lives during conflict, a lot of them passed away due to the injuries that they sustained in combat. So they were not counted as direct combat fatalities.

This is important. We are finding more and more, especially from Fort Carson, there are individuals remaining in El Paso County and the Pikes Peak region. After their service, they come back here or they just stay here.

Mr. HALL. So you think a significant number of the 400 would have—their families would have chosen to have them buried in a cemetery in southern Colorado, were there one in existence.

Mr. SAILAR. Without a doubt, sir.

Mr. HALL. Thank you.

Mr. Grabin, how does the Fort Logan cemetery system currently handle inclement weather? Do they cancel interments? Do they have adequate indoor facilities for services?

Mr. GRABIN. As far as—I believe they do have indoor, as far as Fort Logan. I'm not as privy at this time to give that report. But I know, as far as southern Colorado, when the weather is bad, and they do close Monument Hill, we are not able to get over Monument Hill, even if you had a four-wheel drive, there are days, a four-wheel drive hearse, you would not be able to get over that hill.

Mr. HALL. Thank you, sir.

That red light is for me, and I'm going to yield to Mr. Lamborn.

Mr. LAMBORN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Fernandez, you heard from the testimony of the two widows earlier, and they talked about sometimes there are great difficulties in going from here to Fort Logan. You heard their testimony.

Is there anything you could add to what they said about that particular situation?

Mr. FERNANDEZ. Yes, sir, I'll add two things.

First of all, we did have a friend of ours pass away in December. His name was Colonel Bill Carnahan. Bill passed away about the 14th of December. And because of the weather patterns and topography, he was not able to be buried at Fort Logan until mid-January. That's item number one.

Item number two, I know of at least a dozen families who presently have the ashes of their folks, if you will, on the shelf waiting because they want the cemetery so that they can put them in a proper veteran—national veterans cemetery here in the Springs or nearby.

Mr. LAMBORN. Thank you.

Mr. Sailar, I was talking to a young Army captain last night, and he said that Fort Carson is maybe the most popular place to be stationed in the Army. If it's not the most, it's right up at the top.

With that in mind, will that kind of reputation make the Pikes Peak area—make the numbers of veterans here accelerate more in the future as people rotate in on active duty or come here, possibly, after retirement?

Mr. SAILAR. Sir, your statement is exactly right. I have friends that actually were never stationed in the Pikes Peak region, and in having spoken to them, and told them about the area, they've come out and visited me. They have moved here. And others are planning to move here. So this situation is not just for ones that are stationed here. They are coming back here because they like the area so much and the community is a large veterans supportive community.

There are individuals moving here. Myself and my colleague, Mr. Tackett, belong to the National Association of Veterans Service Officers, and we have contacts all over the country. And we get calls from veterans—in fact, I got calls just last month from a veteran in Florida that is moving to Colorado, who wanted to know what the veteran support system was here, because he's moving here to be with his family. His wife had passed away, and so he's going to move here to live with his daughter and her husband. And we're seeing more and more of this, older retirees and veterans moving into the area to live with families.

My father-in-law, he and his wife, he is an ace from World War II, P–38 pilot. He's 88 years old, and we moved them here from Kansas. So hopefully it doesn't come soon, but when the time comes, there will be a national cemetery here because all of his relatives, my wife and his daughter all live in this area.

Mr. LAMBORN. Thank you.

Another question for you, Mr. Sailar. You said that the VA's numbers do not include active-duty military. Could you do a quick rough calculation for us on if you did include active-duty military and if you included dependents, how would those numbers change for the Pikes Peak area?

Mr. SAILAR. Well, just to give you a quick thing, on Fort Carson, alone, over the next couple of years, they expect over 30,000 active-duty members to be stationed at Fort Carson. I've heard that there's going to be some other units coming in too. That doesn't

count another 45,000 dependents. Now, there are spouses that are eligible to be buried along with their veteran spouse in a national cemetery. There are also children that can be qualified to be buried in the national cemetery with their father or mother if either parent is a veteran.

So these numbers, like I mentioned earlier, from the VA data itself project over 125,000 veterans will pass away along the front rage between now and 2030. That doesn't count spouses. That doesn't count other individuals moving into the area. So those numbers could double very easily.

Mr. LAMBORN. Thank you.

And one last question, before my time is up. Mr. Grabin, you heard what was said about the desire for people in Pueblo. We heard from a County Commissioner, for instance, and Mr. Sterner as well.

Would those same feelings be echoed by the folks that you know where you live in Canon City, which is probably about the same distance, but in a slightly different direction?

Mr. GRABIN. A little different angle. I would personally like to share this portion as a representative of the American Legion in answering that: "As to the exact location, we will leave that decision to the planners to determine the best location that will meet all the provisions of the law and the requirements for growth, space to provide the absolute best setting in terms of view, landscape, serenity for the final resting spot for America's veterans. But we are adamant that the location be south of Monument Hill, located so that the maximum number of veterans be served." That would be El Paso County.

Mr. LAMBORN. Thank you.

Mr. HALL. Thank you, Mr. Lamborn.

Mr. Salazar.

Mr. SALAZAR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

All of you are aware of the proposed sites for the cemeteries, correct? Have all of you been? Is there any preference?

And I'd like each one of you to answer that, starting with Colonel Chostner, if you will.

Colonel CHOSTNER. I prefer the one that is further south. I'm not sure exactly what the name of it is. I'd have to look at it. I'm not sure of the exact name of it. Mr. Sterner can refer to that.

If I could mention, though, Congressman, there are 16,000 veterans in Pueblo County. And if you look at the veterans in Fremont County, El Paso County, and Teller County, you're looking at a significant number of veterans themselves. So in response to your question, Congressman Lamborn, there's a significant population south of the El Paso County line that have availed themselves of a cemetery, hence my recommendation that it be as far south as possible.

One last thing, Congressman, with regard to the inclement weather. I mentioned I had two relatives that were buried in Fort Logan. The last one I did was in January of 2003. That ceremony was almost canceled because of the weather. And secondly, it was held outside, which was not the most appropriate way to commemorate that individual.

Mr. SALAZAR. You are aware that the legislation that is being proposed that we actually passed includes the 29 counties of southern Colorado in order to be able to meet the 150,000 veteran threshold. And that is why we thought that it would be better to be south of Colorado Springs so that we could address all of southern Colorado.

Mr. Sterner.

Mr. STERNER. Yes, Congressman Salazar, and thank you for all your great work on behalf of veterans over the years.

I've done some markups on this. I'd like to point out a couple of things.

First of all, in the 29 counties that were identified in H.R. 1660, the Rio Grande County was not listed, and yet it falls within that area, bringing in another 3,000 veterans. Also locating the cemetery somewhere in El Paso County, or in that vicinity, while it would—Chaffee County and Park County are not counted as part of the southern Colorado region, but they do fall within the attachment area. Park County population is 19.2 percent veterans, one of the highest in the Nation. Chaffee County's population is 17.1 percent. So now we're talking even outside a region of numbers well in excess of the 150,000.

I have done a series of documents that I would be happy to present to the Committee showing five different locations, ranging from the proposed Douglas County option, which I find unacceptable, to my hometown of Pueblo. Frankly, I find Florence is a very, very attractive area, or in that near area between the Fremont-El Paso County line. We've got open area there. It falls well in attachment area for Colorado Springs, for Canon City, for Westcliffe, for Pueblo, and the surrounding areas. That would be my personal preference.

Mr. SALAZAR. Mr. Grabin.

Mr. GRABIN. I don't truly have a personal preference. I want to stay more neutral. I do think that south of Monument, up around the Air Academy, is the most beautiful as far as its scenery. Down toward the old racetrack, south of Colorado Springs, while we have easily accessible, I think that's a very good location. And I'm not so sure as far as out toward Fort Carson, just how that would work, but I think that's something to consider as well.

Mr. SALAZAR. The old dog track area——

Mr. GRABIN. Well, the racetrack.

Mr. SALAZAR. The racetrack, okay. There is actually property there, a sufficient amount. Is it 500 acres.

Is that correct, Mr. Fernandez?

Mr. FERNANDEZ. The Pikes Peak International Raceway portion of that had been sold, and so therefore it's not available. But there are sites on either side of I–25 that are public property. They are property of Colorado Springs Utilities, and there is sufficient acreage, approximately 250 acres, and one in close to almost 300 acres in the other that would be satisfactory.

Mr. SALAZAR. And is your preference closer to the Pueblo line or somewhere in that neighborhood south of Fort Carson?

Mr. FERNANDEZ. Sir, I'm going to have to remain neutral also, but I would like to bring to your attention Figure——

Mr. SALAZAR. You sound like a Congressman.

Mr. FERNANDEZ [continuing]. Figure 4.1. Under figure 4.1, we did rate these things, and we rated them by availability of water, accessibility, acreage, land ownership, topography, aesthetics, and feasibility. And the top sites were the Cheyenne Mountain State Park site, which is actually on Highway 115. Second was the Cane Ranch, which is free property to us.

Mr. SALAZAR. And that was my next question.

Mr. Chairman, I know my time is up, but can I just have another couple minutes? Thank you, sir.

The Cane Ranch, for example, isn't it the owner, if I am correct, he has agreed to actually donate the property?

Mr. FERNANDEZ. He has done so. The property is now in the hands and holding by El Paso County.

Mr. SALAZAR. And that is which proposed site?

Mr. FERNANDEZ. That is proposed site—it's called Cane Ranch. If you'll take a look at Figure 4.1, you'll see that rated 31 points in our booklet.

Mr. SALAZAR. And that is exactly—oh, that's south of Fort Carson.

Mr. FERNANDEZ. It's actually outside—it's outside of gate 1, on Highway 115, across—oh, the Cane Ranch, no. Cane Ranch is in Fountain. It's in Fountain.

Mr. SALAZAR. Well, Mr. Sailar——

Mr. FERNANDEZ. It's south of Colorado Springs.

Mr. SALAZAR. Mr. Sailar, do you have any objection to that site, or is that your preferred?

Mr. SAILAR. Sir, in speaking to a lot of veterans in our community, they want it in southern Colorado, and I have heard them say anywhere other than over Monument Hill; Right on the border line between Pueblo and Colorado Springs is very preferable to everyone that I have spoken to. And I really don't believe any member of any committee that I am a member of, would object to that. If that was the area that was going to be picked, that would be very pleasing to all of the members of our military community and their families.

Mr. SALAZAR. Thank you very much.

And I just want to—just a quick comment. Mr. Sterner, thank you very much for helping to author the Stolen Valor Act, which the President signed into law last year. We really appreciate that.

Mr. HALL. Thank you, Mr. Salazar.

Thank you, all on our second panel, for your testimony and for your service to our country and to our veterans.

And we're now going to take a recess of about 3 minutes and then come back.

[Recess.]

Mr. HALL. The Subcommittee will return from recess and come to order.

And our third panelist is Under Secretary William Tuerk, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, National Cemetery Administration (NCA), for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

And your entire statement, of course, is in the record, as you know, having done many of these affairs. And you're recognized now for your testimony.

STATEMENT OF HON. WILLIAM F. TUERK, UNDER SECRETARY FOR MEMORIAL AFFAIRS, NATIONAL CEMETERY ADMINISTRATION, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. TUERK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it.

And you anticipated my first request, and that is to submit my statement and have it printed in the record. I don't propose to read it to you. You and the visitors here who are in attendance have copies of my testimony, and it's available, and you can read it. So I'll summarize some of the points raised in that testimony, and perhaps amplify some other points, particularly in light of some of the comments that I've heard.

I commend you and I commend the staff for your foresight in making me last, and not first witness. It was useful to hear the prior testimony before giving my own, and I appreciated that opportunity. Surely I was going to stay and listen to the testimony of the witnesses that came after me, but I'm glad I had a chance to hear them before I offered this testimony.

If I may, just a couple things before I start.

First, to Ms. Briseno and Ms. Lee-Witt, I want to thank you both for your husbands' service to our Nation. I'm sure I speak for everyone in the room—the members of the panel have already spoken for themselves in expressing our appreciation for the service that your families have rendered.

I don't know if it's appropriate to do this, but I'm going to do it as just a personal note. To both of you ladies, I can tell you, I understand from personal experience your grief, your situation. I understand from personal experience the comfort one can get from visiting one's spouse's gravesite, and I wish that your spouses' gravesites were more convenient for you. I hope they will become more convenient for you.

Again, I would suggest to you, Ms. Lee-Witt, that when we build a cemetery here in Colorado, you certainly ought to consider having your husband's remains reinterred up here. I can tell you, I have been to the Nashville National Cemetery, and it's an extraordinary site, a very historic site dating to 1862. I happened to be there at an event commemorating the burials of what are called, in sort of arcane language, U.S. Colored Troops, African American citizens of the north who fell to preserve the union. Many hundreds of them are buried in Nashville; it is a very interesting and historic site. Believe me, your husband is in a place of honor there.

Now, if I may, and I'm going to try and do this as quickly as I can. But some of these points, I think, bear some amplification.

First, I'd like to talk just a little bit about the background of NCA and what we're tying to accomplish now—what this formula that's been cited, imperfect though it be. Right now we are engaged in the largest expansion in the national cemetery system since the Civil War. In a course of about 10 years, we will have opened 17 new national cemeteries and over 40 State cemeteries.

Our goal is to provide services to more veterans than are currently served. Our tactic, and we've been directed by Congress to pursue this tactic, is to identify the areas with the largest populations of unserved veterans and locate new cemeteries there. Consistent with that approach, we have, in the last several years, opened up cemeteries in major, major metropolitan areas, Chicago,

Detroit, Cleveland, Dallas, Seattle, Pittsburgh, Miami. We are on target, right now, to open up cemeteries in other large cities, Sarasota, Philadelphia, other sites.

This is not to say that the people of Colorado Springs are served as well as we like or are adequately served. It's a matter of ranking priorities. Chicago, for example, when we decided to build a cemetery there, had 991,000 veterans living within 75 miles of Chicago, veterans who were unserved. Sites that remain to be served don't have numbers quite that dramatic, but I want to make the point that our prioritizing system has attempted to locate the Federal dollars and to locate the facilities where we can do the most good for the most people.

I do understand there are unserved veterans who are not in proximity, even by our standard, to Fort Logan National Cemetery. By our reckoning, about 27,000 veterans live beyond the 75-mile ring from Fort Logan. And I understand reasonable people can differ on whether that's an intelligent standard or not. But by that standard, just for perspective, there are many other cities with many more unserved veterans that have yet to have the benefit of a national cemetery,

In Charleston, West Virginia, for example, there are 154,000 veterans who have no burial option within 75 miles. The nearest national cemetery to the people of Charleston, West Virginia, is West Virginia National Cemetery, 142 miles away, over very difficult West Virginia terrain. Similarly, in the Chairman's home State, in Buffalo, New York, there are 144,000 veterans living within 75 miles of Buffalo who have no burial option at all. The nearest national cemetery to Buffalo is 105 miles away, in Bath, New York, in south central New York. As in West Virginia, there is difficult mountainous terrain to traverse between Buffalo and Bath.

I don't offer this except for perspective on where our standards have led us. I've heard much discussion about the imperfections in that standard, and I recognize there are imperfections in that standard. We know it is imperfect. We have asked a contractor to analyze that standard critically and to perform many other forward-looking activities for us. So that standard perhaps might be changed. But one point I want to make to this community is that, heretofore, we have been less than encouraging to this community using that standard because we took into account the fact that Fort Logan was operating just 59 miles north of here.

We have, however, reassessed the situation in light of one inescapable fact that's already been cited to you. Fort Logan National Cemetery is now interring veterans in its last active area. As one of the witnesses testified, it is landlocked. We cannot acquire land contiguous to Fort Logan. It is going to close, it must close. We estimate now that in 2019, plus or minus 1 or 2 years, that cemetery is going to close.

And as I have discussed with your delegation, we are looking at the situation of cemetery service on the front range in a new way now. We are assessing the situation with the assumption that after 2019 there will no longer be a cemetery in Denver. Looked at from that point of view, if one doesn't take into account the presence of a cemetery in Denver, we see that there are some 285,000 veterans

in the Denver-Colorado Springs-Pueblo area who will be unserved the day that cemetery closes.

By our standard, 170,000 unserved veterans within 75 miles qualifies a location for a new cemetery. Clearly, the front range in Colorado would merit a new cemetery under that standard. And I'm here to tell you, we are proceeding on the assumption that there will be a new cemetery to be located here, a cemetery that will succeed Fort Logan, and I'll get into details about that in just a second. But we are no longer of the view that this community should not get a cemetery. We are committed to the idea that a cemetery ought to come here.

Now, I can't promise a new national cemetery here before you today. I can promise I will actively advocate for it. And I can advise you that I have actively advocated for it with some success. But many other players will be involved before a new national cemetery can be built here, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the next Administration, most importantly, the Congress. I will need the Congress's support to get authorization to build that cemetery and to get funding to build that cemetery.

But subject to that caveat, I can tell you that the National Cemetery Administration will proceed, and we have already started our initial steps. But the point I want to make here is that it's not so much a question of if a cemetery is going to be built here, it's a question of when and where.

Now, let me talk, for a second, if I can, though I'm over my time, Mr. Chairman——

Mr. HALL. Go ahead.

Mr. TUERK [continuing]. On the when and where questions.

First, when. We estimate that Fort Logan will close in about 10 years. I've learned from hard experience over the last couple of years, that it's a 5-year proposition to get a new national cemetery open—to acquire the land, to go through all of the environmental analysis, to design the cemetery, to construct the cemetery's first phase, not the entirety of the cemetery, but just the first phase, is a 5-year proposition. We're about 10 years out from Fort Logan closing. We recognize that reality. We are proceeding now with the first steps to get the new cemetery in place.

What have we done? We have sought and we have pending before the Congress right now a legislative proposal to include in our budget a separate line item, which would authorize us to acquire land independent of a separate authorization to build a new cemetery, to acquire a land in advance of the precise need for that land so that we may start to shop and seize opportunities to acquire land as they become available. We had specifically in mind, when we requested this authority, this community and a couple of other communities that will suffer a similar fate as this one will if we don't get moving now.

Portland, Oregon, is in a similar situation to Denver-Colorado Springs. Our cemetery in Portland can't expand. We've got to find a successor site there. San Juan, Puerto Rico is in a similar situation. We're at the end, the last phase of cemetery development there. We've got to start acquiring land now so that we can have a new cemetery already in place when the old one closes.

If we get this authorization, and if we get adequate funding from the Congress to proceed, we expect, depending on when this year's appropriations bills get enacted, to proceed to start to scout for land immediately. Upon getting that authority and getting funding, we will start to look.

The next critical question is where. This Under Secretary wishes he hadn't already popped off on that subject. But I did testify before your senior Senator about 3 weeks ago. Senator Allard asked me the question of where I thought the appropriate site might be. I did offer in that testimony the view that it seemed to me that somewhere between Colorado Springs and Denver would probably make sense. Why? That point of view was pretty much governed by what I have heard from this community telling me that traversing from here to Denver is unacceptable.

My thought process was, when Denver's cemetery closes, the veterans of Denver would have the same point of view if the cemetery were all the way down here or south of here. They would have to traverse the same traffic that Colorado Springs' veterans do traveling north. They would have to traverse the same weather. They would have to traverse the same highways that the folks in Colorado Springs find unacceptable heading north.

I offered that opinion based, essentially, on that fact. But it was premature for me to have offered an opinion, I think, on where the cemetery ought to be sited. If we get the authority we seek, I am going to send real estate pros out here to scour the entirety of the front range to see what we can find, to see what's available, to see what might be appropriate sites. I or my successor—candidly it will probably be my successor—will get recommendations from that group of professionals, recommendations that won't look unlike these with the sort of scoring, the sort of charting, taking into account various factors. And at that point, the Under Secretary, after having gotten input from the community, will probably, at that point, make a decision on where the site ought to be.

What sort of things will he take into account, will he or she take into account? Certainly the size of an available site is very important to us. This will not be a satellite cemetery to Fort Logan. It will be a full blown national cemetery that we will want to last for up to 100 years.

We will be looking for at least, least 200 acres, probably, in view of the topography here, twice that amount. We will be looking at, and we will take into account, proximity of various sites to the veteran population to be served, a factor that I prematurely took into account with my testimony and my response to Senator Allard. It's one factor; but it's only one factor.

We will look at the quality of the land in question. Does it have access to utilities? Does it have access to water? Is it relatively flat? Is it free from subsurface rock and fill? That's an important factor to us.

We'll take into account, finally, the cost, the cost to buy the proposed site and the cost to develop it. When all of these factors and others are taken into account, that's when a decision will be made. And certainly we will take into account what I have heard here about the desire to be south of—the hill that I——

Mr. HALL. Monument Hill?

Mr. TUERK [continuing]. The Monument that I got stuck in on the way down from here. Certainly that will be taken into account as well. I did not mean to suggest that Pueblo is entirely inappropriate. I did not mean to suggest that southern El Paso County is entirely inappropriate. These things will have to be weighed, but they have to be weighed, it seems to me, in light of the fact that Denver, at the point of decision, will be facing an absence of a cemetery. And there's a very significant veterans' community up there as well.

So to summarize and to close out so that I can answer questions, subject to the caveat that OMB, the Congress, the next Administration will also have to buy in, we anticipate building a new cemetery in this area. When we will build it depends on when we get funding. We will need the assistance of this Committee and other Members of Congress to get the authority and to get the funding to do that.

We must proceed, and I want to make this point clearly. We cannot wait for 10 years when Fort Logan closes to start the process. We have no intention of waiting 10 years. There will be overlap. Both cemeteries will exist, if for no other reason, that we can't fine tune the construction process to the point that the new cemetery opens the day Fort Logan closes. We will get going faster. The two cemeteries will, by necessity, both exist simultaneously for a time before Fort Logan closes, and we're going to have to start in the next few years. And it is my intention, if we get authority, to start as soon as we get that authority, which would be October 1st, if we do it on time.

Where we will go will depend on many variables. But I want to reiterate, I've learned a lot here about the desires of this community, and I will take them into account. And I will assure that my successor takes them into account.

And I'm way over time. And I apologize, Mr. Chairman. I'd be delighted to answer your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Tuerk appears on p. 59.]

Mr. HALL. Thank you so much, Mr. Under Secretary. I'm so glad I didn't have to use this.

Mr. TUERK. I'm glad you didn't, too, sir.

Mr. HALL. You can thank Chairman Filner of the full VA Committee for your being able to testify after the other panels. We try to do that for the reasons that you mentioned. You answered some of my questions with your opening statement, so I'm going to keep it short in order for our Colorado representatives to get their questions in while there's time.

First of all, you made the point about needing Congress's help. I would—I'm sure you've noticed, other people have also, that the House has moved on this issue, and on many issues. In fact, faster than the Senate. So I think you can count on the House of Representatives to be responsive.

Mr. TUERK. I appreciate that. I would ask you to speak to your colleagues on the Appropriations Committee.

Mr. HALL. I'll speak to my brother about running for the Senate.

[Laughter.]

Mr. HALL. You did answer some of my questions, such as the VA taking into consideration factors like weather, driving distance and

terrain. But I wanted to ask you, how long does it take from the beginning of the site selection process to a cemetery opening?

Mr. TUERK. As I said, it's about 5 years. Let me divide it into two pieces. Once we select and secure a site, it's generally about a 3-year process to get a cemetery open, and I know that sounds ridiculous, but it takes time to acquire a site, I've learned. It's a difficult possess. It takes time to do the environmental analysis. It takes time to resolve all the mitigation issues. It takes time to design the cemetery. And finally, it takes time to get the initial portions of the cemetery open. That's about a 3-year process.

From a point where we decide we're coming to a community, it's probably 2 years before we can buy a site. We can't just come in and make a decision to buy a site. We have to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act. We have to do all kinds of environmental analysis on alternative sites. And it chews up much, much time. That's why we need to get started pretty quickly.

Mr. HALL. I agree, sir. The reason I'm asking this, if it's 5 years on average, and the Denver cemetery, Fort Logan cemetery will be full and closed, you're guessing, around 2019. It's 2008. If we were to make some kind of a quick decision, for instance, have a decision—start the 5-year process by 2010, and have that cemetery open 2015, wouldn't that take some of the pressure off of Fort Logan for the remaining time that it's open?

Mr. TUERK. Oh, I think it would. I think it would result in Fort Logan being open longer, the population from down here, if the cemetery were to be located down in this direction, would now be going to the new cemetery. And I think Fort Logan would last longer.

Mr. HALL. Maybe we could even move in 2009 to get the process started. But anyway, that's my only question for now.

Mr. Lamborn.

Mr. LAMBORN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and that's exactly what my first question was going to be.

My hope is that if we were to have something moving here, then by extending Fort Logan, because there would be less demand for the space there, because this would take up some of the demand, that would stay open longer to serve the people of the Denver metro area.

So it would be my hope that we could have two cemeteries, at Fort Logan cemetery and a southern Colorado cemetery.

Mr. TUERK. As I tried to express, I think that's inevitable. There will be overlap between the two facilities. Because if I were here, I wouldn't risk an interruption in service. And I'm betting my successor won't risk it either, won't risk having a single day where the Denver-Colorado Springs community isn't served. He or she will need to get the new cemetery up and moving before the old one is closed. And there will be an overlap, and I think the only issue is how long. And that depends on whether we can find land, how quickly we can find land, et cetera.

There will be a job ahead dealing with the OMB and dealing with the Congress on why do you need to do it now, Mr. Under Secretary? I can hear it coming. Can't you wait a couple years? We'll have to work through that issue, but we have no more than a 5-year window—by the simple arithmetic, we've only got about 10

years of capacity left at Fort Logan, and it's going to take us 5 years to get up and moving at the successor site. We've only got about a 5-year flex.

Now, that seems like a long time. But as I have learned in this job, in the course of building a $30 million, $40 million cemetery, and a cemetery that's going to cost hundreds of millions of dollars over its life, it takes time. It takes time to comply with the statutes that we have to comply with, and so it's only a question of how long.

Mr. LAMBORN. Thank you.

Now, let's talk about the specific line item that I was so happy to work with you on, and to see your Department moving forward on, and that is asking for the $5 million.

Mr. TUERK. And I certainly appreciated your assistance.

Mr. LAMBORN. Thank you. You've mentioned Fort Logan. You also mentioned Portland, Oregon. You also mentioned San Juan, Puerto Rico. That line item is not earmarked for one of either those three places. It's not earmarked for any particular place.

What assurance can you give us that $5 million would be used here in Colorado?

Mr. TUERK. Well, I guess I can't give you that assurance yet. I don't have it yet.

I don't know, candidly, how much money we're going to need for all three of these communities. For example, in Portland, there might be an opportunity to get land for free, at Camp Bonneville through the Base Realignment And Closure process. Alternatively, we may be buying there. Perhaps there will be opportunities to get land here for free, from the Academy or from other sources.

So I'm not sure how long it will stretch, how far the money will stretch. But we will have a start. We will have the ability to transfer money from some of our other accounts, if necessary, from our construction account, if we can into that account. And furthermore, Congress might further supplement in future years the amount of funding that is in that account.

Mr. LAMBORN. Mr. Secretary, let me mention that, for the record, on the Republican budget views and estimates that I support, we are asking for $20 million for that particular line item. I'm hoping that as we go through the total negotiations of the entire budget process, that one way or another we can bump up that $5 million.

Mr. TUERK. Senator Allard and I had that discussion on that very point. And I think he is—he is aware of that possibility as well. I had to tell him I don't know precisely what it will take because I don't know what donations I'm going to get, and I don't know where I'm going to buy land.

For example, in this community I'm told—and I drove it yesterday to get a sense of the lay of the land at least—that land between Colorado Springs and Denver is considerably more expensive than land between Colorado Springs and Pueblo.

I've told you, it is our intention to build the cemetery at the right site, not at the cheap site, and we will hope that we will get the support of Congress to get enough funding to buy the proper site—the site that we all come to agreement on is the appropriate place. But what that precise amount will be, what the quantum of re-

quired funding will be, as I said to Senator Allard, is right now an unknown.

Mr. LAMBORN. And our veterans deserve that. They need the right site, not like you said, a cheap site or something that's just because it's there, because it's available.

Mr. TUERK. The fortunate thing is, it can be the case that a cheap site is the right site. Mr. Salazar noted us going together to the Georgia National Cemetery at the base of the Blue Ridge Mountains, a little bit north of Atlanta. That site was a gift to VA by a real estate developer, and it is an extraordinary site. So it might be that the ranch, for example, that was mentioned in earlier testimony is an entirely appropriate and beautiful site. There's not necessarily direct relationship between quality and how much a site costs. But we will have to scout the sites that are available and start to make some sensible decisions on where would be the better sites.

Mr. LAMBORN. Thank you so much for your testimony, for coming here, for your answers to my and the other questions.

And, Mr. Chairman, if we have time for a short second round, I certainly wouldn't mind that at all.

Mr. HALL. Thank you, Mr. Lamborn.

Mr. Salazar.

Mr. SALAZAR. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, Under Secretary Tuerk. I just appreciated your time with me in Georgia and your work on behalf of veterans.

As you know, our budget continues to tighten up, and tighten up, and tighten up. This $5 million line item, in order for it not to be considered an earmark, could have a specific place for it to go. In other words, it would just be, in general, for the VA. And that's probably the reason that you can't really say that it would be just for El Paso County unless you support earmarks. I personally support earmarks because I live in a very poor district, and that's the only way that I can get the Federal Government to fight for—or get Federal dollars back to my district as the budget continues to get tighter.

It seems to me like the logical place for this to happen is really the Cane Ranch, which is more than the 200 acres that is your minimum. It's actually a 400-acre block. It's right at the base of Pikes Peak. It's right next to the gate of Fort Carson, the southern gate of Fort Carson. And, you know, in light of our budgetary problems, I would really urge you to look at that site. And, of course, like you said, it's not going to be up to you. It's probably going to be up to your predecessor.

Mr. Chairman, I would also urge you that in this coming year, that we move toward and try to make the needs of the VA heard to the VA Committee, so that we can get this process started. I agree with you. I think that if—the sooner we get started, the longer longevity we're going to have at the Fort Logan cemetery.

And Frankly, Mr. Tuerk, I'm a strong believer that people in Denver, they'd love to get out here in the country and rest.

[Laughter.]

Mr. SALAZAR. Now, you talk about a monument, Pikes Peak, what a beautiful monument to have as your headstone. But I don't

have any questions, Mr. Tuerk. I just wanted to thank you for your dedication to the veterans.

Mr. TUERK. Let me offer this. We will look at that site. It would seem it certainly merits a look-see, and we will look at that site, and we will look at the other sites in this report. This is good, valuable work, and I appreciate it very, very much. We will probably look at other sites as well but I'm happy to go look at that site. And if I don't, the career professionals who will be on staff, irrespective of who sits in the Under Secretary's chair, will, I think, be interested in looking at it as well.

One of our factors is cost. It's not our only factor, but it's not an insignificant factor. And certainly, there would certainly seem to be some cost advantages there. But still, other questions would remain. Is it proximate to the population? Does it have a water source? Are there utilities? What is the topography like? What are the subsurface strata like? These are the sorts of things that my pros have to look into, because they also weigh on the question of cost, specifically on the cost to develop.

Mr. HALL. Mr. Tuerk——

Mr. SALAZAR. Can I finish up, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. HALL. I'm sorry, Mr. Salazar.

Mr. SALAZAR. I just wanted to ask you, in this case, for example, you're not really proposing buying a site. Can you actually send your planners out to look and see if this would be a site that could actually be used as a cemetery?

Mr. TUERK. I think what I would like to do is look at it in comparison to other potential sites. But that said, sure, if you would like me to do that, Mr. Salazar, I will be happy to send them out and take a preliminary look. They will make a judgment, I believe, looking at that site in relation to other potential sites. But we could at least get a feel, early on, whether that site might be feasible.

Similarly, I've heard, perhaps, that the Academy might possibly have some sites available. We'd be happy to look at those as well, independent of this authority. I still need authority to secure them, but I don't think I'm going to have much problem getting the authority to take possession, as distinguished from buying. So we would be happy to look at that site, and I can direct that be done, Mr. Salazar, and I will so direct.

Mr. SALAZAR. I appreciate that. One other thing, I just wanted to thank you for noting today that your comment at Senator Allard's hearing was premature.

Mr. TUERK. I knew I shouldn't have said that.

Mr. HALL. We're going to—since we have until 3 o'clock, roughly, have a lightning round, a second round of questions.

And, by the way, another editorial comment. I don't call them "earmarks." I call them "legislatively directed initiatives." We had a discussion actually, in the Subcommittee about this when we were talking about cemeteries last year, during which I said that it's my belief that we, in Congress, are a co-equal branch of government, and that it's not only our right but our duty to try to represent our constituents, and that both of those gentleman, Mr. Lamborn and Mr. Salazar, have been doing a very good job of that in Washington.

Furthermore, I don't believe that this should be looked at as somehow targeting Federal money that's paid by the taxpayers of Colorado to the government in Washington, that somehow the representatives in Congress are trying to bring some of that money back here for real needs, for real people to serve, in this particular case, to serve the veterans' community. I don't think there's anything wrong with it. In fact, I think it's highly constitutional, and should not be a dirty word. It's not a guppy museum. It's not a bridge to nowhere. It's a real thing that is needed of the community. So, end of sermon.

I wanted to ask you what kind of public input incurs ordinarily in the site selection process.

Mr. TUERK. We always go to the veterans service organization community through forums that they have sponsored on our behalf to get the views of local veterans. We have, on occasion, depending on the site and depending on the sensitivity and depending on the level of controversy, I would anticipate in this community, we—let me back away from that statement.

We have also participated—I have spent many, many hours in suburban Philadelphia before township boards of supervisors and planning commissions talking to them about various alternative sites in metropolitan Philadelphia.

So we've spoken to the people's elected representatives at the very local level on these issues as well.

It kind of depends on the community. It depends on the level of interest and controversy. In some cases, there is much demand for public input. In others, there is less, it would seem. But we will do what needs to be done in order to get the support of the community. It is essential for us that the community support where we go, that the community support the cemetery that is going to be part of that community for as long as a century. So we seek that out.

Mr. HALL. Thank you, sir. And how do you do that? Is there a Committee? Do you have an advisory Committee once you decide on a region or an area.

Mr. TUERK. Yes, that's one of our mechanisms. We will appoint a Director before we've even started construction, and ask him or her to set up veterans outreach mechanisms, including advisory Committees and the like. And yes, we do that.

Mr. HALL. Is there or is there not a formalized process by VA to do that?

Mr. TUERK. There is no formalized process, no, sir.

Mr. HALL. So does it vary from case to case, or is it sometimes more clear that everybody prefers one?

Mr. TUERK. It does. It does vary from case to case, and there is not a formal process. I have been trying to telescope the length of time it takes to open up the six new cemeteries that I'm attempting to open up right now. In Bakersfield and Birmingham, Alabama, in Columbia, South Carolina, in Philadelphia, and in two other sites, Jacksonville and Sarasota, I have been attempting to get these sites opened as quickly as possible, basically thinking about my dad, who has now passed on, and his generation. I'm trying to get sites open as quickly as I can so that they can be of use to the World War II generation.

I have resisted lengthy APA sort of mandated formal procedures for securing community input so that we could get moving. That said, I have spent a lot of time before local bodies, service organizations, as have my employees, in order to assure that we have a consensus within the community of where to go. And in all the sites we have picked in these six sites, the veterans' community is supportive.

Mr. HALL. That's good to know. Would you object to a highly efficient and short community process being formalized?

Mr. TUERK. My successor will probably be displeased if I say yes, but no, of course, we would not object to that.

Mr. HALL. It might actually help.

Mr. TUERK. We want community support.

Mr. HALL. Like the study we just saw, some work has been done, in effect for you, by veterans' groups.

Mr. TUERK. I would ask the Chair, however, to consider—of course, we could conduct more formalized and regularized sorts of proceedings. I guess I would just ask the Chair to assess whether we lack community support and input under the less formal processes that we're using now. And I would suggest to you, Mr. Chairman, that we do not.

Mr. HALL. Today, certainly, seems like there's plenty of input.

Mr. TUERK. And these are the sorts of proceedings that we seek out. It's not often that a Congressional Committee conducts a hearing like this.

But I have stood before some pretty tough bodies of citizens, and not just veterans, but also planning commissions, boards of supervisors and the like, getting their buy-in. And I've done an awful lot of that, and will continue to do that. And I'm sure my successor will. Not because the law requires it, but because our approach to being an accepted member of a community mandates that we do it as a matter of just being smart.

Mr. HALL. Thank you. And my time is about to run out again, but on a different topic, how many of the national shrine projects have been restored or completed, and when do you think the entire project will be finished?

Mr. TUERK. We've had a good year in 2008. The Congress was very, very generous with us on funding for national shrine projects. Coming into this year, we were better than halfway through, as I recall, that original list of national shrine projects. This year, the Congress, if memory serves—and I jotted these numbers down when I heard your statement because I anticipated you might ask about this—if memory serves properly, the Congress fenced $27 million of operations and maintenance money for us this year to do national shrine projects, all of which will be focused on turf renovation, headstone raising and realigning and cleaning. In addition, Congress gave us three times what we asked for, if I recall—we asked for $25 million, and we got $75 million for minor construction. That is a huge increase, and much of it will be dedicated to capital improvement national shrine sort of projects. We'll be well past the halfway point then.

I do want the make one point, though, about that list. That list was a list of projects that needed to be done at that point in time. We assess every year the state of our cemeteries, what needs to be

done now, what projects should take priority over, perhaps, lower priority projects on that original list, and we reshuffle the deck every year to make sure that our money doesn't just go to getting rid of projects specified on an old list, but making sure that our money goes to the highest priority projects. But we're making substantial progress.

Mr. HALL. That's good. I'm glad to hear that. Therefore, given the funding that you received, are you on target for your national shrine completion?

Mr. TUERK. It's difficult to answer that question because that implies that a certain point in time will be finished.

Mr. HALL. Would trajectory be a better word?

Mr. TUERK. Trajectory may be a better word because we will never be done with projects that need to be done to achieve and maintain national shrine status. Cemeteries need constant attention. Buildings continue to deteriorate. Roofs continue to go bad. HVAC systems continue to go bad. Turf goes bad. Headstones move over time. So it's not a static thing that we will ever finish. We will never finish.

I would point out, you'll see I wear this lapel pin which commemorates and really congratulates my employees for achieving the highest American Customer Satisfaction Index Survey scores any organization, public or private, has ever gotten in 2009, repeating our achievement from 2003. Toyota came in second. National Cemetery Administration came in first.

Mr. HALL. Congratulations.

Mr. TUERK. Thank you. I appreciate that.

Why do I bring that up? The public was asked to assess our physical plant, our facilities, whether they meet national shrine status, and we scored 98 out of 100 on that count. We're not complacent. We're not finished. We'll never be finished, but we're making great progress, and we will make—we will achieve—shrine status at every cemetery, and many still need work.

Mr. HALL. Thank you, Mr. Tuerk.

I'm going to have to stop you there, and turn to Mr. Lamborn for a second round of questions.

Mr. LAMBORN. Okay, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

This is a two-part question. The first has to do with a study that's being done now. It was supposed to be done yesterday. But it has to do, among other things, with the burial programs of the VA, and a review of that, as well as some other matters that the office of policy and planning was working on.

When will that be done at this point?

Mr. TUERK. This is being done by an outside contractor, and is being administered by a different office within VA than the National Cemetery Administration. The latest I hear, and I will do my best to hold them to it, I'm hearing that a draft will be available for us to comment on May 15th. And I'm hearing later this summer for a final report.

The Deputy Secretary and I have been pushing the VA's Office of Policy and Planning in trying to move these folks along. Some of these delays were unavoidable. But we want to get this report while we're still in office at VA to use it to start to chart NCA's future course. This it is not the only thing we will use in charting

that course. This is a tool, not the tool, that we'll use to chart the future course.

But it will study many things, including the 75-mile, 170,000 veteran criterion, which I know was controversial here, but which I believe probably isn't any longer because, even under that criterion, we're going to build a new cemetery here because Denver's closing. But we're also asking them to look at services we provide. Should we offer urban facilities, for example—and there are many things we're asking them to look into.

Mr. LAMBORN. That's good. With our limited time, I'd like to focus in on that 75-mile rule, with 170,000 veterans being served. To me, the current status, the current regulations are sort of wooden. They're inflexible. They're rigid. They don't take into account the weather that we have in Colorado, or the Monument Hill, or the Palmer Divide, as its called, or Buffalo weather.

In the Midwest, you know the terrain is easier. In eastern areas of this country, it's more of a congested population. But things like travel distance, travel time, access to public transportation, traffic, and then, of course, as it's come up time and time again, natural barriers and features, including weather and mountain ranges, are really not taken into account. I mean, 75 miles here between Colorado Springs and Denver might take the time it would take 100 miles to travel in the Midwest.

So if we said, well, this is the equivalent of a 60-mile difference, as opposed to 75, then all of Colorado Springs is left entirely outside of the so-called served area, and would more easily qualify for its own area.

Mr. TUERK. I do understand that point. Again, we're going to get a cemetery here on the front slope in any case, but I do understand that point, and we asked them specifically to take such factors into account. And it's not just geographic terrain.

Let me give you an example that's very, very different from the one you cited. The cemetery which serves New York City is out on the end of Long Island. There aren't any mountains between Calverton National Cemetery and the Brooklyn Bridge. But by golly, the traffic is something awful. Similarly, our cemetery that serves Los Angeles, Riverside National Cemetery, is 65 miles from downtown LA. I've driven it. It is urban driving the entire time, the entire distance, and no place has traffic jams like LA has traffic jams.

We've asked them to take into account factors such as that as well. That's part of the travel time equation as well, not just physical impediments, but density of population between here and there, and we have asked them to see if they can come up with a way that does adapt some flexibility. Though, again, I would point out there are communities like Omaha and Buffalo and Charleston, West Virginian that even under this standard, would seem to be places that can make a good case, even though they don't meet our criterion.

For example, Charleston, West Virginia has pretty tough terrain and pretty lousy roads. Getting from Buffalo to southern New York is a pretty tough proposition in the winter. So we have seen these problems in the context of many communities, and that's why we directed the contractor to do precisely what you're suggesting here.

Mr. LAMBORN. I look forward to that study. And once again, thank you for your time.

Mr. TUERK. You bet, sir. My pleasure.

Mr. HALL. Mr. Salazar, any further questions?

Mr. SALAZAR. Yes, just a quick one.

Mr. Secretary, what is the typical cost of creating a new national cemetery at this point in time?

Mr. TUERK. We put that in our written testimony, and I'll refer to that. It is on page 4 of my testimony. There we estimate costs to build the initial phase of the cemetery, the first 10-year buildout.

First, I would point out, we buy several hundred acres. We do not develop them all in year one. We take 10-year bites.

Mr. SALAZAR. Excuse me. Let's just say that a site, if you don't have to acquire the land, what would the cost be?

Mr. TUERK. Apart from the land, as we summarized in our testimony, it takes anywhere from $500,000 to $750,000 to get through environmental compliance requirements. It takes $1 million to $2 million to conduct master planning and to design a new cemetery. It takes $5 million to $10 million, perhaps more, to acquire land, but you're asking me to set that aside. Actually, it cost us more than that in Sarasota, for example. We spent $12 million for property down there. Once we have the land, once we've done the design and environmental compliance, which is anywhere between $2 million to $4 million, actual construction of the first 10-year phase of a cemetery is a $20 million to $30 million proposition. And then each subsequent phase will cost a similar amount of money, though slightly less than the initial phase because we only have to build an admin building and maintenance facilities in the first phase. And then in the second phase, we're just expanding grave sites. That's what it costs for the first 10-year build out of a national cemetery today. And of course, that doesn't take into account construction inflation, which can be pretty considerable.

Mr. SALAZAR. Okay. This leads to my next question. Is it legal for the VA to take gifts?

For example, let's just say that Mr. Lamborn, and Mr. Hall, and myself, and all the members of this community were to go out and raise funds so that we could begin the initial phase. And maybe we could raise $15 million or $20 million toward the construction. Does this legislation actually make it legal to accept land as a gift, but not necessarily funding for the construction.

Mr. TUERK. Actually, VA currently has authority to accept gifts of land. The land you walked down in Atlanta, for example, was a gift. The cemetery we're about to build in Bakersfield will be on land that we will have received as a gift, from Tejon Ranch Company, a large landowner.

Mr. SALAZAR. Do you have the authority to actually accept funds for the construction?

Mr. TUERK. I do not know the answer to that, Congressman. I'd have to ask Counsel. I do know we can accept land, and I know VA, the larger entity that I'm part of, can accept gifts and bequests. And many people every year give money to VA in their wills. Whether we can accept gifts under this sort of circumstance, I'd have to run through Counsel.

Mr. SALAZAR. I would appreciate if you could look that up for us.

Mr. LAMBORN. And let all of us know.

Mr. TUERK. Sure. You bet.

[The VA responded in a follow-up letter from Under Secretary Tuerk, dated July 11, 2008, which appears on p. 97.]

Mr. SALAZAR. I think that Mr. Lamborn and Mr. Hall, in all their infinite riches, would be happy to help. And so would I, in my poverty.

Mr. HALL. Thank you, Mr. Salazar.

Mr. Tuerk, thank you very much for your testimony.

I thank everybody here today for being here and thank you, especially, to all of our witnesses on all three panels.

We will allow 5 legislative days for Members to revise and extend their remarks. Of course you can all send, if you would like, a correspondence to the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs of the full Veterans' Affairs Committee at the House of Representatives in Washington. That can be done by e-mail, actually, through the Web site, as well as by snail mail. So I'm going to encourage you, if there's something left unsaid that needs to be said, then we'll be happy to wait for that.

[The Committee does not accept e-mail through the Committee's website, but the public may fax correspondence to the Committee at 202–225–2034.]

Mr. HALL. Thank you again for your insight, your opinions and your passionate caring and service to our veterans and an attempt to resolve these questions in a democratic fashion.

I'm enjoying my time in Colorado. Thank you very much, Mr. Lamborn, for inviting me.

Mr. SALAZAR. Mr. Chairman, if we would have the national cemetery here, I want to let you know that there would probably be a lot more Democrats in El Paso County.

Mr. HALL. You're probably right. Thank you all.

And the hearing now stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 2:56 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

Prepared Statement of Hon. John J. Hall, Chairman, Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs

Good Afternoon.

Would everyone please rise for the Pledge of Allegiance?

Thank you all for coming to today's Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs' field hearing entitled "Is the VA Cemetery Construction Policy Meeting the Needs of Today's Veterans and their Families"—a topic of particular significance to this region and throughout the country.

A few preliminaries: First, I ask unanimous consent, that Congressman John Salazar of the 3rd District of Colorado and a Member of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs be invited to sit on the dais. Without objection, so ordered. I would also like to recognize any Members or staff representing Members in the audience.

Welcome Congressman Salazar. It is a pleasure to have you be a part of these DAMA Subcommittee proceedings and I know your input will prove invaluable to today's topic. I am pleased that H.R. 1660, a bill you sponsored to build a national cemetery in the southern Colorado region passed the full House unanimously and now awaits further action by the Senate. I know that you and Ranking Member Lamborn as well as the rest of the Colorado delegation have worked on VA's national cemetery policy concerns in your region on a bipartisan basis. I am glad we are able to bring this hearing to your state where these issues are front and center.

Last preliminaries: Also, in accordance with Committee Rules, I ask that all cell phones and pagers be turned off. As we have a lot of business to conduct in a short period of time I would like to conduct this hearing with as few interruptions as possible. Also, out of respect for our witnesses, I ask the audience to please refrain from speaking out of order.

I would first like to thank the witnesses for coming today to appear before the Subcommittee. I know the issues pertinent to the national cemetery policy at the Department of Veterans Affairs or "VA", are of utmost importance to you. I look forward to receiving your testimonies.

On a personal note, as Chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, it is a special privilege for me to conduct this hearing in my Ranking Member's district, Mr. Doug Lamborn and an honor for me to be able to address the issues facing veterans in or nearby their hometowns. Although my district, the 19th district of New York is thousands of miles away, we share a lot of similarities with Mr. Lamborn's district (CO–5th). For instance both our districts are home to one of our Nation's fine military academies, in mine there is West Point and in Mr. Lamborn's, the U.S. Air Force Academy. Also our districts house many prominent military installations and are both places where a high percentage of our Nation's veterans call home. In fact, the Southern Colorado region, I understand is home to one of the largest concentrations of World War II and Vietnam veterans in the country.

Since their genesis on July 17, 1862, national cemeteries have served as the hallowed resting place for our Nation's veterans and their loved ones. Currently VA operates 125 national cemeteries in 39 States and Puerto Rico and maintains over 2.8 million gravesites. The annual number of burials is on the up rise, with just 36,000 in 1973 to over 100,200 in 2006. Veterans, who have served in this country's Armed Services, are buried in cemeteries operated by the States, VA, the Department of Interior, Arlington National Cemetery, and American Battle Monuments Commission. VA also provides grants to over 69 State veterans' cemeteries under its National Cemetery Administration's State Cemetery Grants Program that operate in 35 States, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

We are here today to examine the adequacy of VA's current policy which entails locating national cemeteries in areas with the largest concentration of unserved veterans and providing a reasonable access to a burial option in a national or State

Veterans cemetery within 75 miles of their residence. As such VA concludes that new national cemeteries will be established in areas with an unserved veteran population threshold of 170,000 within a 75-mile radius. Under this policy 83% of all veterans are served, the converse of which means that there are at least 17% or nearly 2 million veterans and their families who are underserved by this policy.

The Subcommittee also addressed the VA's national cemetery policy issues last year during a hearing held on May 8, 2007, wherein I expressed concerns of whether this policy was adequate enough to address both rural and urban locations. Those concerns still stand. I also think it is critical that VA makes sure that there is plenty of opportunity for public input during any new cemetery policy or location selection process. I know that VA is currently conducting its own study of these criteria and has plans to move the percentage of veterans served to 90% by FY 2010. I look forward to hearing more about these plans during your testimony.

In the way of follow-up to last year's hearing, I would like to be updated on the current status of VA's National Shrine Commitment.

Lastly, the Subcommittee has been apprised of a situation at Greenwood Island or the old Camp Jefferson Davis site and the Soldiers' Asylum Home in Pascagoula, Mississippi, where veterans of the Mexican American War are buried but whose resting places are being eroded by nature and construction. It is reported that some of the coffins and or bodies have became disinterred being found by local fisherman I appreciate the NCAs response provided by staff, but I would like to know the NCA implications of this situation and how we can possibly remedy this oversight.

Prepared Statement of Hon. Doug Lamborn, Ranking Republican Member, Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs

Good afternoon, thank you Chairman Hall.

I would like to personally thank you, Mr. Salazar, and your staff for making this field hearing possible. There is a lot of work involved with bringing Congress to Southern Colorado and I appreciate it. It is an honor to participate in this momentous occasion. I also thank you and your staff for your flexibility and patience with the number of witnesses that will present important testimony today.

I would also like to thank all of the witnesses for being here today, especially my good friend, Undersecretary for Memorial Affairs Bill Tuerk, for joining us here today to discuss the Department of Veterans Affairs policy for the construction of new national cemeteries.

Mr. Chairman, properly honoring a deceased veteran is one of our most sacred and solemn responsibility. These patriots have earned honored repose in a national shrine. Veterans and their families are due the tribute and thanks of a grateful nation. We should ensure that the final resting place for our great heroes is accessible to family members and all proud Americans who come and pay tribute to the service and sacrifice of those brave men and women who have borne the battle.

We are seeing increased demand on all of our National cemeteries, especially as members of the Greatest Generation pass from our presence. VA estimates that interments in national cemeteries will rise from the current level of 2.8 million to 3.2 million by 2012.

The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) estimates that as early as 2016 Fort Logan National Cemetery will be at full capacity and they will be looking to construct a replacement cemetery.

Today Mr. Chairman, we will hear very emotional and eloquent testimony from Coloradans who are personally affected by the distance of the national cemetery in Fort Logan near Denver to their homes and communities.

I believe that there is a better way to determine need than drawing circles in a 75 mile radius around a national cemetery to determine where the most "underserved" veterans are.

There are many other factors that need to be taken into account including travel time to and from national cemeteries, access to public transportation in the area, and other factors that are more tangible than a large circle on a map.

However, I know that this problem is not just limited to Southern Colorado; and if we held this hearing in many other cities and towns across the Nation that we would find these problems and concerns extend to many rural and urban regions like Nebraska, New York City, Los Angeles, Buffalo, NY, and many other areas that are adversely affected by VA's somewhat arbitrary rules.

Mr. Chairman, it is for that reason that I was pleased to work with you and Mr. Salazar to pass H.R. 1660, as amended, in the House last year.

This bill would authorize the establishment of a national cemetery in El Paso County and greatly benefit those veterans and families in this fast-growing area. This bill represents a major step forward in campaign to establish a national cemetery. I urge our colleagues in the Senate, including Chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs Senator Akaka of Hawaii to take this bill up as soon as possible.

I also hope that all of our witnesses understand that when this legislation is enacted we must all work together to help NCA find a suitable location for this cemetery that serves the highest number of veterans and their families. I believe that this location should be in El Paso County and I will work with you Mr. Secretary to ensure that this is the case.

I want to thank everyone once again for being here and I am looking forward to the testimony.

Thank you Mr. Chairman, I yield back and welcome you to Colorado!

Prepared Statement of Linda Lee-Witt, Peterson AFB, Colorado Springs, CO, Member, Gold Star Wives of America

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the committee.

My name is Linda Lee-Witt. I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am a widow, and a member of Gold Star Wives of America, Inc. which is a non-profit membership organization, chartered by the U.S. Congress as a unique organization on December 4, 1980. To be eligible for membership, your spouse must have died while on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces or died from a service related disability.

I am also the Administrative Officer of the Retiree Activities Office under the 21st Air wing, Peterson Air Force Base working directly with retirees, spouses, and dependants.

Because of my involvement with Gold Star Wives, and the RAO, I am in a position to hear the frustrations, and concerns of surviving spouses, dependants, and retirees.

My testimony today will be my story. My husband grew up in a military family. His father fought during WWII, and retired from the Army as a Major. As a child, my husband lived and went to school all over the world.

Like his father, my husband dedicated his whole career to the U.S. Government. He honorably served our country during the Vietnam War and peace time in the United States Air Force.

After retiring from the Air Force, he continued to serve his country in Civil Service working in Safety Engineering at Fort Carson, where he deployed with the troops wherever they went. Whether it was to Kuwait after the Gulf War, fighting fires in California, training and educating our soldiers and their commanders on safety issues, or investigating accidents and fatalities off and on Base when it involved any of our troops. He had a deep passion and love for this country, for our soldier's and their safety, and he identified with what they and their families faced every day.

He was a true patriot, and a hero. He died from a service connected cancer on Nov. 3, 2004 in our home. Because there had been a snow storm, and our driveway is up hill, the mortuary van was unable to navigate the driveway to pick up and transfer his body to the funeral home. Our son had to put his father's body in his four wheel drive to get down to the van.

I wanted my husband to be buried with the full military honors that he so deserved. For months after his death I kept his ashes, not wanting his remains to be buried in a civilian cemetery, but also wanting his remains close. All of our children and Grandchildren live here. We have a very large military presence in El Paso County that is quickly growing, yet no military cemetery. Because of the month of my husband's death, it is often not possible to get safely over Monument Pass to Denver. Veterans Day, when it would mean so much for my children and grandchildren together as a family, to see firsthand the price that has been paid by so many for the freedom and the rights we have today. For them to take part in the ceremonies honoring our veterans, and paying tribute to those brave warriors who risked their lives for their country and families. To see those who have given all, being honored on that special day in a national cemetery, knowing that their father and grandfather paid the ultimate price, would be a valuable and inspiring experience for us together as a family. Again, it is not always possible to travel over Monument Pass to get to our national cemetery at that time of year.

My husband's parents settled in Nashville TN, where two of his brothers still live. I finally decided to have his remains buried in the national cemetery there. I regret that realistically, we will never all be able to visit the Nashville National Cemetery together. Only one of our children has been able to make the trip to see the site where their father is buried. The others have only seen pictures.

Right now, with the war in Iraq, our city is rapidly growing. There are more and more troops being stationed here, and more and more new young widows and dependants living here. As it was with my husband, many of our service men and women opt to stay, and live in Southern Colorado. In the next few years, the new retiree population will be much larger here then it will be in the Denver area. We need a national cemetery here, in El Paso County. It doesn't make sense to build one anywhere else in the state with so many of our military bases here in southern Colorado.

As I talk with the widows of the WWII and Vietnam era, they express how hard it is to make the trip to Denver. Because of their ages, many must rely on someone taking them to Denver because they are afraid or unable to drive themselves. Many of them have expressed they were not able to find the National Cemetery at Fort Logan when they did go.

In talking to the young Iraq widows and their family's, it is clear that it is a hardship for them to take a whole day with young children, to visit their husband's graves. They say that during the grieving process it would be so comforting to be able to sit quietly by the graves of their loved ones while their children are in school, without having to try to find a babysitter. That due to the distance, changing weather conditions so common in our area, and the traffic, they can't risk not being able to get back in time for their little ones. They tell me how important it is and how healing it is for their children to see the place where their parent's remains are, so that they can work through their grief, and see how their parent was given a resting place among our bravest and best. Hero's all. To see how our leaders and our country honor our fallen hero's, and to be proud of their parent's sacrifice and dedication to a better and free country for them.

I would like to quote from President Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural address, March 4, 1865. "With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see right, let us strive to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who has borne the battle, his widow and his orphan."

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today and express the views of myself and other military spouses, dependants, and retirees on an issue very close to our hearts.

Prepared Statement of Milly Briseno, Co-Founder, Colorado Military Survivors, Colorado Springs, CO (Iraq War Widow)

At the height of my husband's 17-year Army career and in the 13th year of our marriage, our life came to a screeching halt. An unexpected massive stroke, at the age of 35, took his vibrant life from this temporary home and left my three children and I reeling as we struggled for direction and purpose in this completely unfamiliar world of loss. My husband's untimely death came just one month after moving to Fort Carson. As a young family, full of promise and a bright future, we did not think to discuss burial plans. I struggled to know how to honor his life as a dedicated soldier whose career in the Army Medical Specialists Corps demonstrated his commitment to the restoration and preservation of life. To honor him and affirm my family's identity as a military family, we chose to bury my husband at a national cemetery. Fort Logan was the closest one to our home and my in-laws' home.

It has been difficult to visit his gravesite for many reasons. My family, and my in-laws, reside in Colorado Springs, near Fort Carson. The traveling distance to such a congested metropolitan area poses great inconveniences for my young family. At the time of my husband's death, my children were 9, 5 and 2½ years old. A trip to Fort Logan involves an entire day's plans and is challenging at times for the children. With the weather here in Colorado, we mainly make it to Fort Logan, at the most, two times per year. We miss most of our significant special occasions such as birthdays, anniversaries and other holidays because they occur in the fall and winter seasons. As a family, we try to set a goal to get to Fort Logan at least for Memorial Day.

The effects of limited visits to Fort Logan have had an impact in these first three years of grief not only for my immediate family but also for my mother and father-in-law, my husband's sisters and their families. Our family has had decreased par-

ticipation in commemorative events which occur at Fort Logan. We have had less opportunities to connect with a military-sensitive and supportive community which can be found among the visitors at Fort Logan. My family may miss out on one way to continually affirm their military identity. I, myself, have struggled with having less access to an acceptable place to face the reality of grief and process those complicated emotions.

It is difficult to deal with grief as a younger widow with young children. Through my involvement with Colorado Military Survivors, I have found that a new generation of widows is emerging. This new group of widows faces additional struggles in dealing with grief because we do not fit the common stereotype. I attend a widows support group at Fort Carson which averages from 5–8 participants. Up until recently, I was the oldest one by at least a decade. We are finding that we must find a safe place to face our grief, one in which we have opportunity to express our emotions of loss and pain. That is why we gather and that is why, I wish we were closer to Fort Logan.

The small plot of land that I stake claim to in Denver, holds a vital place in my ability to process my grief. My husband's headstone is an immovable reminder that forces me to face the heartache involved in the unexpected ending of his earthly story. His headstone solemnly stands among thousands of its kind at Fort Logan. To most, these pale stones represent so much pain and suffering, but to me they each hold a story. They are just like a sea of bookends.

The dates engraved on my husband's stone tell the beginning and the finale of his life. His headstone is a fixed mark that causes me to focus on the finale. A cemetery is an acceptable place in our society to express one's grief. Young widows find very few acceptable places to deal with their loss. With now almost three years of learning in the obstacle course of grief, I realize the necessity of exercising this heartache. It has taken me a long time to come to the understanding that heartache is strength-training. It helps transform the weakness of my faith into a powerful conditioned response to my loss. Once only heartache, pierced through with fear, now has become thanksgiving that appreciates the work of sorrow.

Military loss is more complex, especially for young families that face this sudden tragedy. Our society still puts expectations on grief "recovery". It is a lifelong process to learn to move forward with one's grief. As an organization, Colorado Military Survivors strives to unite survivors in their loss and help them find strength in a community well-acquainted with sorrow. My initial connection with one of my dear friends now, also a young widow with two young children, was made at Fort Logan when I discovered that her husband was buried just two rows away from mine. Together we face each day, encouraging each other to press on, to remember, to have faith in God and to grow through our grief in order to help another. If we were able to be closer to a place that would help us face these challenges with greater strength, we could be more effective in encouraging a new generation of grieving families by affirming their value and by assuring them of the honored place of appreciation that their loved ones hold in our community.

Prepared Statement of Victor M. Fernandez, Member, Pikes Peak Veterans Cemetery Committee, Colorado Springs, CO

Good Morning, Congressmen. My name is Vic Fernandez, and I am a founding member of the Pikes Peak Veterans Cemetery Committee. Thank you for coming all the way out to Colorado to hear our message, and thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak for the Pikes Peak Veterans Cemetery Committee.

I am here today to answer three major questions.

First: Why do we need a new National Veterans Cemetery in Colorado?

Second: Why should it be established in the Pikes Peak Region?

Third: What have you (meaning us) done to assure that a national Veterans Cemetery is established here?

In response to the first question it is important to know that the State Of Colorado's major National Veterans Cemetery is Fort Logan in Denver.

A new cemetery is needed because Fort Logan is filling up fast, and is expected to reach capacity between the years 2020 and 2024. However, Fort Logan National Cemetery is landlocked in a residential area of Denver, and can not be expanded without purchasing the very expensive developed residential land around it. The longer period of capacity is contingent on construction of a Columbarium on ground already set aside for such a facility at Ft. Logan.

Because of the size, geography, and weather hindrances of the State of Colorado, and the small size and remote location of the state's other Cemeteries at Ft Lyon,

and Homelake, the Veterans Count of The Pikes Peak Region are poorly served, and these Cemeteries do not offer reasonable service to Denver and its surrounding population centers.

This life of service of Fort Logan can be lengthened somewhat for the Veterans of Denver and Northern Colorado if the Pikes Peak Veterans Cemetery were to be established and open within the next five years. The actual lengthening of lifespan is totally dependant upon when the cemetery we propose is established.

In response to the second question, there are several cogent reasons why the Pikes Peak Region is the logical location for the proposed National Veterans Cemetery.

First, is the fact that the large Veteran population of The Pikes Peak Region and southern Colorado has not been properly served by Fort Logan, or the other veteran cemeteries in Colorado. Fort Logan is location in a difficult-to-find residential section of a major metropolitan area with poor access from Interstate or other highways. This has meant that surviving spouses and families from southern Colorado sometimes have made the trip to visit their loved ones, but failed to find the Cemetery.

Second, in Winter, it is especially difficult to get to Denver from Southern Colorado because of the Monument Hill geography, and the Palmer Divide weather patterns. These geographic and weather pattern hindrances make the Veterans Administration internal 75-mile rule a useless tool in the State of Colorado. The combination of the geography, weather patterns, and a foolish regulation serve only to assure that the Veterans and their families in the Pikes Peak Region and southern Colorado are not properly nor fairly served by Fort Logan.

Third, the future Veteran demographics for Colorado will show that the Pikes Peak Region, with its six military installations are producing Veterans at a much faster rate than the remainder of Colorado, where only one small Air Force Base exists. Fort Carson, which is the Army's most popular station of choice, is alone on track to grow to a military population over 30,000 soldiers. And when many, if not most of these local military complete their service, they remain in the area, which further accelerates the growth of the Veteran population here. We also find that a large number of military who were once stationed here, return here after military retirement. In short, our veteran population is growing at a much faster rate than the remainder of Colorado.

Additionally, we find it interesting and somewhat incongruous that our large active-duty military population is not counted in the Veteran population numbers used to determine populations served by National Veterans Cemeteries. This is especially telling since approximately 400 of our local military have given their lives during the Global War on Terror. While some of these brave Americans were buried in their hometowns, many of them have been buried or inurned in our local civilian cemeteries. These active duty Americans need to be counted, and properly served by a National Veterans Cemetery in the Pikes Peak Region.

So, what have we done to assure that a National Veterans Cemetery is established in the Pikes Peak Region?

My colleagues and I have worked for the establishment of a National Veterans Cemetery in the Pikes Peak Region of Colorado for over ten years. In that time, we have solicited the backing of members of the House of Representatives including Congressmen Joel Hefley, Doug Lamborn, John Salazar, and the past and present Colorado Contingent. We have also received the backing of Senators Ben Nighthorse Campbell, Wayne Allard and Ken Salazar over these years. Additionally, we have the backing of County Commissions and City Councils from several counties and cities in southern Colorado, as well as the last two Governors of the State. We are supported by the Pueblo Veterans Council, The Pikes Peak Veterans Council, all of the Veterans Organizations in the surrounding five counties, and the United Veterans Committee of Colorado.

We have made personal contact with, and have carried on letter-writing campaigns to the serving Secretaries of Veterans Affairs for these past ten years. To date, we do not consider any of the responses from the VA to be satisfactory. They appear mostly to be boiler plate responses, written to protect internal VA agendas.

Politically, working in concert with our past and present elected Congressional and Senatorial representatives we have helped write and support House and Senate Bills which specifically address the establishment of a National Veterans Cemetery in the Pikes Peak Region to serve southern Colorado's Veterans. The present House Bill, written by Congressmen Salazar and Lamborn passed in the House, and was sent to the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, where, much to our chagrin, neither the Senate Bill nor the House Bill have been stymied by Senator Akaka. Letter writing campaigns to him have not brought any results, as he has not responded

to us, and has not placed the Bills on the Committee agenda for discussion and passage.

Locally, we studied the VA regulations, we have performed due diligence studies regarding site selection, land requirements and acquisition, water and environmental requirements, we have done on-the-ground surveys of potential sites, and we have written a comprehensive plan entitled *"A National Veterans Cemetery For The Pikes Peak Region"*.

For your information and use, here is a copy of the 2008 Pikes Peak Veterans Cemetery Committee's planning document. It contains color maps and photos of the various undeveloped sites, and most importantly a matrix (Figure 4.1) that contains the Committee's ranking of the ten most viable sites. Our conclusions and recommendations are contained in section Five. The Appendices contain 2000 Census data, and the VA Fact Sheet on creating a Veterans Cemetery.

All sites included in this plan are more than 75 miles from Fort Logan, however, if this requirement is waived to move the proposed cemetery closer to Denver, we would recommend it be sited along I–25 on the Air Force Academy. Of course, The Commanders of Fort Carson and The Air Force Academy are precluded from making any commitments to us concerning use of DoD land, but since it is already federally owned, we know a Veterans Cemetery established in the installation buffer zones can be authorized, and can be used to protect against encroachment on these military installations.

Conclusion

In order to provide sufficient burial space for Colorado's Veterans in the future, and to fairly meet the needs of southern Colorado's Veterans, plans for the Pikes Peak Veterans Cemetery must get underway immediately. Please do not wait until Ft. Logan is full before establishing a new Veterans Cemetery in Colorado. Use the plan we have already produced and provided to you as a starting point. And finally, please address the need to move the pending Bills for a Veteran Cemetery in the Pikes Peak Region through Senator Akaka's Committee for Congressional passage.

Thank you!

Prepared Statement of Bud Sailar, Director,
El Paso County, CO, Veteran and Military Affairs

Good afternoon Congressmen. My name is Bud Sailar and I am the Director of Veteran and Military Affairs for El Paso County, Colorado.

I thank you for the opportunity to testify and present the views of our local veterans and their concerns. Like many, we consider the National Cemeteries as memorials to veterans who preserved our freedom.

The future Veteran demographics for Colorado will show that the Pikes Peak Region, with its six military installations are producing Veterans at a much faster rate than the remainder of Colorado, where only one small Air Force Base exists. Fort Carson, which is the army's most popular station of choice, is alone on track to grow to a military population over 30,000 soldiers. And when many, if not most of these local military complete their service, they remain in the area, which further accelerates the growth of the Veteran population here. We also find that a large number of military who were once stationed here, return here after military retirement. In short, our veteran population is growing at a much faster rate than the remainder of Colorado.

Additionally, we find it interesting and somewhat incongruous that our large active-duty military population is not counted in the Veteran population numbers used to determine populations served by National Veterans Cemeteries. This is especially telling since approximately 400 of our local military have given their lives during the Global War on Terror. While some of these brave Americans were buried in their hometown, many of them have been buried or inurned in our local civilian cemeteries. These active duty Americans need to be counted, and properly served by a National Veterans Cemetery in the Pikes Peak Region.

Presently, over 100 burials per week are taking place at Fort Logan. During the next 22 years, according to VA data, there will be over 40,000 veteran deaths in the Southern Colorado area. Many of these veterans will not be honored in a National Cemetery because during the same 22 years, there will be over 90,000 veteran deaths in the Denver area alone. This will more than tax the cemetery at Fort Logan.

Prepared Statement of Tim Grabin, Department Commander, Department of Colorado, American Legion

Mr Chairman and members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for allowing The American Legion Department of Colorado to present its views on the VA Cemetery Construction Policy and whether it is meeting the needs of today's Veterans and their families.

I have enclosed a copy of the resolution adopted by our National organization as part of my written testimony that was passed by our National convention in Salt Lake City in August of 2006. This remains our current position on the burial allowances and burial plot allowances and the establishment of additional national and state veteran's cemeteries.

Specifically I would like to concentrate my remarks on the need for additional cemetery space in Colorado and hopefully in the Colorado Springs area serving veterans in the southern parts of Colorado and other areas not served by a national cemetery.

The population of the State of Colorado continues to grow and new veterans and their families are a part of that growth. Historically, because of the numerous military establishments in the southern Colorado area, veterans return to Colorado after their tour of duty to retire or to make Colorado their new home because of the climate, environment and the strong military support systems in place. This trend has continued for many, many years and I don't see that trend abating anytime soon. With the new veteran population growth will come the need for new cemetery space and the Southern Colorado area is the perfect place for a new cemetery establishment.

I understand there is debate on whether a new cemetery would need to be a stand alone national cemetery with its own unique name and its own administration or a satellite of the Ft Logan Cemetery in Denver. As Department Commander of The American Legion I would like to put our organization on record as favoring the brand new concept and we would not favor the satellite concept. I do not believe that a satellite could or would adequately address the needs of the veteran or their family. For instance, during our winters in Colorado on many occasions Colorado Springs is separated and isolated from Denver because of inclement weather over Monument Hill. To count on the Ft Logan establishment to provide support services during those times would possibly delay or cancel services for those being intered. This would not be an acceptable outcome for our veteran heroes. All support services must be co-located within the new cemetery.

As to the exact location we will leave that decision to the planners to determine the best location that will meet all of the provisions of the law and requirements for growth and space to provide the absolute best setting in terms of view, landscape and serenity for the final resting spot for America's veterans but we are adamant that the location be south of Monument Hill and located so that the maximum number of veterans be served.

In closing we want to thank the Subcommittee for the opportunity to express our views and we want to continue to be a part of the discussions and decisionmaking process. We stand ready as an organization of over 2.7 million veterans nationwide to put our strong voice behind your efforts.

EIGHTY-EIGHTH NATIONAL CONVENTION OF THE AMERICAN LEGION SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

AUGUST 29, 30, 31, 2006

RESOLUTION NO.: 313

SUBJECT: The American Legion Policy on the National Cemetery Administration

Origin: Oregon

Submitted by: Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) National Cemetery Administration (NCA) was established by Congress and approved by President Abraham Lincoln in 1862 to provide for the proper burial and registration of graves of Civil War dead; and

WHEREAS, NCA is currently comprised of 123 national cemeteries in 39 states and Puerto Rico, as well as, 33 soldiers' lots and monuments; and

WHEREAS, More than 2½ million Americans including veterans of every war and conflict are buried in VA's national cemeteries; and

WHEREAS, More than 25 million veterans and Reservists and National Guard members have earned the honor of burial in a national cemetery; and

WHEREAS, Annual interments in national cemeteries have annually increased and are projected to increase for the next several years due to an aging veteran population; and

WHEREAS, Appropriate land acquisition is a key component to providing continued accessibility to burial options; and

WHEREAS, Operations, maintenance, renovation, and construction funding must continually be adjusted to reflect the true requirements of the National Cemetery Administration; and

WHEREAS, NCA administers a program of grants to states to assist them in establishing or improving state-operated veterans cemeteries in locations where there are no nearby national cemeteries; and

WHEREAS, In 2005, there were 61 operating state cemeteries that performed more than 200,000 interments; and

WHEREAS, Congress must provide sufficient major construction appropriations to permit NCA to accomplish its stated goal of ensuring that burial in a national or state cemetery is a realistic option by locating cemeteries within 75 miles of ninety percent of all veterans; and

WHEREAS, In addition to providing a grave site, NCA provides a headstone or marker, a Presidential Memorial certificate, a U.S. Flag, and perpetual care for the grave; and

WHEREAS, The 1990 Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act eliminated the then-headstone allowance of $85, which was paid to all eligible veterans in lieu of a government-provided headstone or marker and now directly provides a standard government headstone or grave marker to eligible veterans anywhere in the world; and

WHEREAS, VA pays a burial allowance of $2,000 for veterans who die of service-related causes. For veterans who were receiving VA compensation or pension, VA pays $300 for burial and funeral expenses and $300 for a plot. The plot allowance would still be payable to state veterans cemeteries; and

WHEREAS, If a veteran passes away in a Department of Veterans Affairs hospital, nursing home, or domiciliary, or in an institution at which the individual was receiving hospital or nursing care at the expense of the United States at the time of death, VA will pay for the cost of transporting the remains to the place of burial; however, a veteran who passes away in a State Veterans Home is not allowed transportation cost for the remains to the place of burial by VA; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Salt Lake City, Utah, August 29, 30, 31, 2006, That The American Legion support the establishment of additional national and state veterans cemeteries and Columbaria wherever a need for them is apparent and petition Congress to provide required operations and construction funding to ensure VA burial in a national or state veterans cemetery is a realistic option for veterans and their eligible dependents; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion support restoration of a veterans burial allowance and an increase in the burial benefit; along with restoration of the pre-1990 Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act criteria to provide eligibility for a government-furnished headstone or marker allowance and restoration of the burial plot allowance for all honorably discharged veterans; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion support action to provide that when an eligible veteran dies in a state veterans hospital or nursing home, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall pay for the cost of transporting the remains to the place of burial as determined by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Prepared Statement of C. Douglas Sterner, Past Chairman, Colorado State Board of Veterans Affairs

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on behalf of my fellow veterans in Southern Colorado.

On February 4, 1945, in heavy fighting in the Ardennes Forest during the Battle of the Bulge, Army Private Harold E. Hissong was killed in action. On learning of his sacrifice, half-a-world away in the small town of Somers, Montana, his mother Florence Hissong planted a tree in front of the entrance to her home overlooking the Flathead Lake.

Exactly five years later, nearly to the day, I was born in nearby Kalispell. In many ways I grew up alongside that tree, for I could not miss it every time I visited my grandmother. As a growing boy, each time I saw it, that tree stood always as a reminder not only of the uncle that I never knew, but of the great price of freedom and the responsibility passed on to every new generation to answer its own call to duty whenever the rights of free people are threatened anywhere in our world. When my day came I understood my duty, and was privileged to serve my Nation during two tours of duty in Vietnam. I was in no small part inspired by the lessons learned from a tree planted in honor of a dead American hero.

I have come to learn and understand that memorials are NOT about those who went before; those who either individually or collectively are called to mind by such memorials. Rather, those memorials stand as an example, and as a beacon, to inspire and guide future generations of Americans. You see, the location of our Veterans cemeteries is not so much about the convenience with which we place our dead, as it is how convenient we make it for those who have lost a loved one to be constantly reminded, and inspired, by monuments reflecting their selfless service to America.

The question before the Committee today is, **"Is the VA Cemetery Construction Policy Meeting the Needs of Today's Veterans and their Families?"** I applaud the goal set forth by the VA in the last several years of locating suitable Veterans burial locations within 75 miles of their hometown. As a policy this echoes the ethos of the warrior that says, "I will never leave a comrade behind." No matter where in the world brave young men and women in service to our Nation fall, they know that their comrades will do all in their power, to and including risking and even sacrificing their own life, to insure that every fallen hero will return home.

For the soldier in the field, insuring that a fallen comrade is recovered and returned home is not predicated upon policies established within the constraints of budgets or convenience, it is a solemn obligation to those who served and sacrificed. As a nation, we have no less a solemn obligation to insure that the final resting place of our veterans be in close proximity to their home, not only out of some moral obligation, but also as a sign of respect to the living who remember them fondly.

My hometown is Pueblo, Colorado, only 30 miles south of where we are meeting today. Though it is my adopted hometown, I have come to love it for a unique sharing of the values I hold dear. Fifteen years ago Pueblo was recognized by the U.S. Congress as America's **Home Of Heroes** due that fact that at that time it was the only city in America to have four sons who were living recipients of our highest award for military valor, the Medal of Honor.

It should not however, be surprising that Pueblo would produce four such heroes in three different wars over the span of only 24 years. Pueblo is the Home Of Heroes not only because of the four men who earned the Medal of Honor, but also because of the thousands of others who served with pride and patriotism when duty called. The 2000 census reflected that Pueblo, Colorado, numbered among the top five cities in America with populations over 100,000, in terms of the percentage of living World War II veterans. Such dedication to service is endemic to our community which believes strongly in duty, honor, country, and in the obligation to serve. In 1970 Pueblo comprised only 5% of our state's population, yet during the Vietnam War of that period, Pueblo sons and daughters reflected nearly 10% of our state's more than 600 soldiers killed in action. Our city is today, in fact, home of the Colorado State Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Not only do the members of our community believe in personal service, we are committed to remembering all those who have served.

Eight years ago two of our Medal of Honor recipients died within months of each other. Bill Crawford, who earned the Medal of Honor in World War II, was buried at the Air Force Academy cemetery, having established a relationship with that institution in the later years of his life when he worked there as a lowly but dedicated janitor. Colonel Carl Sitter who earned the Silver Star in World War II and the Medal of Honor in Korea, was buried at Arlington National Cemetery, where today 383 other Medal of Honor recipients rest.

Raymond G. "Jerry" Murphy was born and raised in Pueblo, and during the Korean war became the third Puebloan in less than ten years to earn the Medal of Honor. In later years he chose to live in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he worked in the Veterans Administration to help other veterans. When Mr. Murphy became seriously ill a few years ago however, he returned home to Pueblo, to live in the Veterans Nursing Home there.

On April 6, 2007, Jerry Murphy passed away in his hometown of Pueblo. Although funeral services were held in his hometown, Mr. Murphy was subsequently transported far south to the Santa Fe National Cemetery for burial. You see, there exists today no Veterans cemetery within 90 miles of Pueblo to insure that Mr. Mur-

phy or, for that matter Mr. Crawford or Mr. Sitter, could have returned home for their final journey.

In point of fact, the VA Cemetery Construction Policy failed these three distinguished heroes, as well as the people of Pueblo who remember them fondly. It continues to fail the families of a city of more than 100,000 citizens, comprising one of the highest percentages of World War II veterans—and in fact a uniquely high percentage of veterans of all recent wars—who must travel more than 100 miles and navigate the traffic of Metropolitan Denver, to pay respects to loved ones buried at Fort Logan.

Please consider the needs of our city as well as the entire Southern Colorado Region, remembering our obligation to our veterans and their families, and provide for a much-needed National Cemetery in our area so that our heroes will rest in peace and dignity where they belong—at home in Southern Colorado.

This concludes my oral statement to the Committee.

EXHIBITS

VETERAN NUMBERS & STATISTICS [1]

As a state, Colorado veteran statistics rank within the median of the overall national numbers. Based upon on the 2000 Census, Colorado ranks 22d in the Nation in overall population and 21st nationally in the percentage of adults over age 18 who are veterans of military service. Specifically, the 2000 Census counted a total civilian adult population in Colorado of **3,177,044,** of which **446,385** were identified as Veterans. As such, Colorado veterans represent **16.5%** of the state's adult civilian population, a number that is **2%** higher than the national average of **14.5%**.

The burial needs of Colorado's active duty military personnel killed in the current Global War on Terrorism, as well as surviving veterans of wars past, are addressed primarily in three of four National or State Veterans Cemeteries as follows:

COLORADO NATIONAL & STATE VETERANS CEMETERIES

1. **Fort Logan National Cemetery,** located in the heart of metropolitan Denver, is the largest Veterans Cemetery in Colorado. Nearly 100,000 veterans have been buried at Fort Logan since 1889.

NINE of Colorado's ten largest cities lie within the 75-mile catchment area of Fort Logan, and SEVEN of these NINE comprise the Denver-Metropolitan area with a population of 1½ million adult citizens. Two of these nine largest cities border the Fort Logan catchment area with Colorado Springs (the 2d largest Colorado City) 67 miles from Fort Logan and Fort Collins (the 5th largest city) lying 72½ miles from Fort Logan. This means that in all, nearly TWO MILLION Colorado citizens reside within the catchment area of Fort Logan which, by all estimates, based on current burial rates, will reach capacity by the year 2020.

The southern Colorado city of Pueblo is the ONLY city in the state with a population greater than 100,000 that is totally outside Fort Logan's catchment area at a driving distance of 111 miles from that site.

2. **Fort Lyons National Cemetery** is the only other National Veterans Cemetery in Colorado. Located in the eastern plains, the nearest large city is Pueblo, which is 15 miles beyond the catchment area at 90.4 miles. Only 11 of Fort Lyons' 52 acres have been developed, providing burial for a total of 3,042 eligible veterans and family members. Through Fiscal Year 2007, Fort Lyons has buried 2,144 persons and, without expansion in the near future, that facility can accommodate fewer than 1,000 additional burials. That reality is critical in light of the fact that this is an area of our state that has one of the highest percentages of veterans among the population.

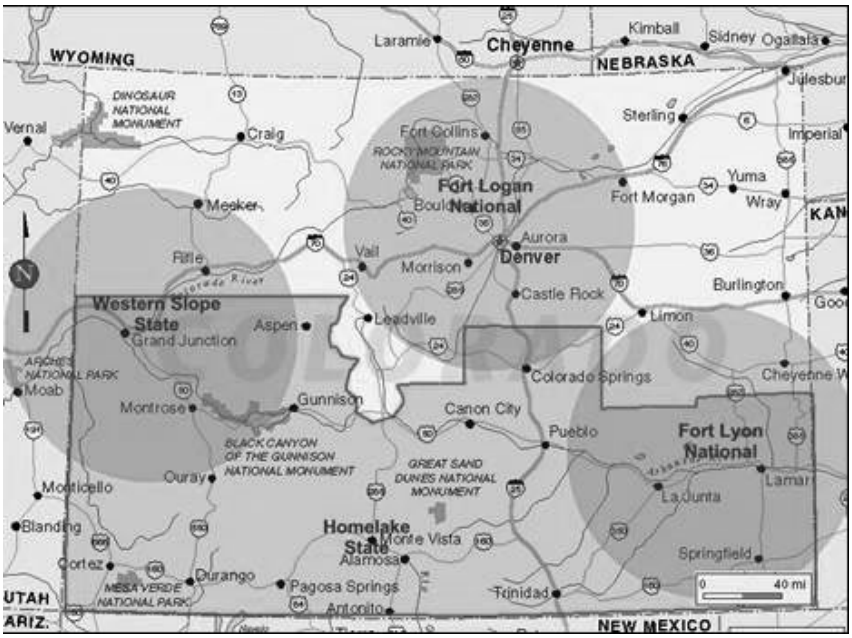
3. **The Veterans Memorial Cemetery of Western Colorado** is one of two *State Veterans Cemeteries* located in Colorado. Opened in 2002, it adequately addresses veterans burial needs on Colorado's Western Slope and, with a present capacity of more than 3,000 burials on the property's 22½ acres, it will be sufficient to meet the needs of Veterans and their families west of the Continental Divide for decades to come. Due to its far-west location however, the cemetery's impact on areas of concern in today's hearing are virtually nil.

4. **The Colorado State Veterans Center At Homelake** is the only Veterans' burial facility located entirely in the area defined as the Southern Colorado Region. The grounds of that facility are nearly full and it offers fewer than ten burial sites at the time of this hearing. The Homelake cemetery has virtually no current positive

[1] Unless otherwise cited, all statistics are based upon the 2000 Census, as reported in "Veterans: 2000, Census Brief," U.S. Census Bureau, Issued May 2003.

impact on addressing the future burial needs of veterans in the southern counties of Colorado.

Figure 1—National & State Veterans Cemeteries in Colorado



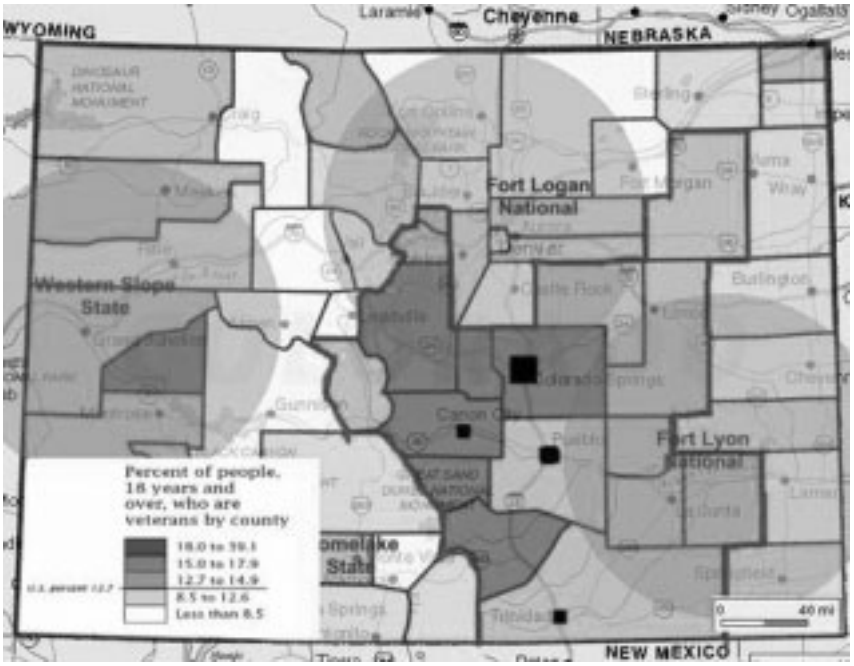
The three operational cemeteries accepting Veteran burials in Colorado are reflected above with the green circles denoting a catchment area with a 75 mile radius. The 29 counties defined in H.R. 1660 as comprising the "Southern Colorado Region" are within the area shaded red.

Figure 1 clearly demonstrates that the city of Colorado Springs, our State's second largest city, lies at the far edge of the catchment area for Fort Logan National Cemetery. Pueblo, our state's ninth largest city, lies 15 miles outside the catchment area for Fort Lyon National Cemetery and 36 miles beyond the catchment area of Fort Logan. The desperate need for a national cemetery in this region becomes even more imperative in light of the demographics of these two cities, as well as that of the rural areas farther south and west.

COLORADO VETERANS CORRIDOR

The 2000 Census demonstrated that Colorado as a whole has a Veterans population 2% above the National average. Even more striking is a Veterans demographic for the geographical area that runs from Colorado Springs, south through Pueblo to the New Mexico border, and west into the Colorado Rocky Mountains. This area, comprising 9 of the 29 counties defined as the "Southern Colorado Region" were found in the 2000 count to have a veterans population **far exceeding** the national average.

Figure 2—Colorado Veterans Corridor



Counties denoted above in light blue have Veterans populations **significantly** larger than the National average, and those counties shaded in the dark blue were found to have veterans populations **one-and-a-half times** the National average. This high proportion of veterans in Southern Colorado is further reflected in the statistics for the two largest cities in the Veterans' Corridor.

COLORADO SPRINGS VETERAN POPULATION

The centennial count identified more than 50,000 veterans living in Colorado Springs (nearly 75,000 in El Paso County), a number which at that time indicated a veterans population comprising more than 20% of the total civilian adult population of Colorado's second largest city. Of 250 American cities with a population in excess of 100,000, Colorado Springs ranked 5th in the Nation in terms of its percentage of veterans:

Figure 3—Ten Major Cities with high Veteran Populations

Ten Places of 100,000 or More With the Highest Percentage of Veterans in the Civilian Population Aged 18 and Over: 2000 (Data based on sample. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error and definitions, see www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf)

Place	Number of veterans	Percent of veterans	90-percent confidence interval
Hampton VA	28,312	27.1	26.5–27.8
Clarksville, TN	15,319	24.4	23.7–25.1
Fayetteville, NC	19,060	23.7	23.0–24.4
Virginia Beach, VA	60,260	21.7	21.4–22.1
Colorado Springs, CO	51,609	20.2	19.9–20.6
Norfolk, VA	30,068	19.9	19.5–20.4

Place	Number of veterans	Percent of veterans	90-percent confidence interval
Newport News, VA	24,021	19.9	19.4–20.4
Columbus, GA*	24,984	19.6	19.1–20.1
Chesapeake, VA	25,621	18.9	18.4–19.4
Portsmouth, VA	12,955	18.4	17.8–19.1

Among these same 250 major American cities:

- Colorado Springs ranks **3rd** in the Nation with the highest percentage (**7.8%**) of **Vietnam War** and Vietnam era veterans (**20,011**).
- Colorado Springs ranks **8th** in the Nation with the highest percentage (**5.7%**) of **Gulf War** veterans (**14,650**).

Of further significance is a steady migration of retiring active duty military personnel into the Pikes Peak region, in no small part due to the location of the U.S. Air Force Academy, Fort Carson, and other military posts in the vicinity. At a time when the percentage of veterans is declining through attrition in most communities across the nation, Colorado Springs continues to experience an increasing number of military retirees that may, in fact, push the 2010 enumeration well above the already-high percentage revealed eight years ago.

While *northern* El Paso County falls within the catchment area for the Fort Logan National Cemetery, *southern* El Paso County including the south side of Colorado Springs and popular military retirement areas at Fountain and Security outside Fort Carson are beyond the catchment area. Considering that the Fort Logan facility is already overburdened to meet the needs of eight of our State's largest cities, including the Denver-Metropolitan Area, construction of a new National Veterans Cemetery south of Colorado Springs would both relieve pressure on the existing facility to the north, and provide a convenient and dignified burial location for the many families of Colorado Springs' significant veterans population.

PUEBLO VETERAN POPULATION

Thirty miles south of Colorado Springs and well beyond the catchment area of Fort Logan and Fort Lyons National Cemeteries is the city of Pueblo, the only Colorado city with a population in excess of 100,000 residents that has no convenient Veterans cemetery. Pueblo is the ninth largest city in Colorado and ranks 242d in size among the 254 American cities with populations over 100,000. Pueblo is, however, a city whose populace has risen to the call of duty time and again in wars of the past, in far greater numbers than almost any other large city.

Of the 254 largest American cities:

- Pueblo ranks **4th** in the Nation with the highest percentage (**4.2%**) of World War II veterans (**3,201**)
- Pueblo ranks **9th** in the Nation with the highest percentage (**2.8%**) of Korean war veterans (**2,133**).

As a community the citizens of Pueblo have demonstrated not only an uncommon willingness to serve their Nation in time of war, but also an admirable sense of community pride in its sons and daughters currently on active duty, as well as its veterans of past wars. In 1993 Pueblo was recognized by the U.S. Congress as America's ***Home Of Heroes*** due to the fact that is was the ONLY city in America with four living recipients of the Medal of Honor. This symbolizes a tradition of valor that extends far beyond these four distinguished hometown heroes; more than FIFTEEN Pueblo servicemen have received one of the military's top two levels of awards, more than any Colorado city other than Denver.

In honor of its Veterans, Pueblo is the site of one of only FOUR National Medal of Honor memorials, and is home to the Colorado State Vietnam War Memorial. Currently development is underway on Pueblo's Historic Riverwalk Project for a Veterans Bridge to honor local veterans of all wars, as well as those who have served in peace time.

The proudly patriotic citizenry of Pueblo, a city that was once described by a visiting Medal of Honor recipient as *"The most patriotic city in America,"* have no convenient and appropriate place to bury our dead among their comrades in arms. For the veterans who reside in America's *Home Of Heroes,* and the surviving family members who have gone to uncommon efforts to ensure that their service is never

forgotten, the **VA Cemetery Construction Policy is NOT Meeting the Needs of Today's Veterans and their Families.**

ENUMERATION

Nine of the 29 Colorado counties identified as the "Southern Colorado Region" lie within the area I have defined herein as the **Colorado Veterans Corridor** (Figure 2). Five of these nine counties have veteran populations **well above** the national average (**12.7%**), ranging from **18.9 to 21.8%**. Based upon the 2000 Census, veterans number by county as follows:

County	Percent	Male Under 64	Male Over 64	Female Under 64	Female Over 64	Total Veterans
Custer County	**21.8%**	353	228	13	—	**594**
El Paso County	**21.4%**	51,007	14,902	8,126	955	**74,990**
Fremont County	**21.3%**	5,267	2,135	324	62	**7,788**
Huerfano County	**18.9%**	661	483	35	17	**1,196**
Teller County	**19.9%**	2,204	557	253	—	**3,014**
	21.0%	**59,492**	**18,305**	**8,751**	**1,034**	**87,583**

The other four counties in this corridor have veteran populations of between **15.7–17.7%** of the total adult civilian population. Those numbers are reflected as:

County	Percent	Male Under 64	Male Over 64	Female Under 64	Female Over 64	Total Veterans
Bent County	**17.7%**	504	283	18	3	**808**
Crowley County	**16.9%**	581	167	10	—	**758**
Las Animas Cty.	**16.0%**	1,030	733	67	14	**1,844**
Otero County*	**15.7%**	1,352	680	92	15	**2,139**
Pueblo County	**16.7%**	10,001	6,528	837	234	**17,600**
	16.6%	**13,468**	**8,391**	**1,024**	**266**	**23,150**

*Otero County is NOT listed among the 29 counties comprising the Southern Colorado Region in H.R. 1660, but it IS surrounded on all sides by counties that are, and lies within the catchment area of the proposed National Cemetery.

The remaining 20 counties defined as located within the Southern Colorado Region have an aggregate population of more than 350,000 adult civilians and a veteran population that averages **14.2%** of the adult population. A total of **38,254** veterans were counted in these 20 counties in the 2000 census.

Based upon this data, a total of **148,987** veterans would be directly impacted by location of a new Veterans Cemetery in southern Colorado. This exceeds the VA's desired population impact by nearly 150%. More than 50,000 of these veterans enumerated above currently reside more than 100 miles from the nearest Veterans cemetery and a large number of those live more than 150 miles from the nearest such facility.

OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE

More than 16 million men and women served in military service during World War II, more than at any other period in our Nation's history. Six decades after that war the Veterans Cemetery System has become strained by their burial needs. Veterans of that war continue to pass away in large numbers in a daily basis, further bringing our veterans cemeteries to capacity or near-capacity.

In the year 2000 the World War II veteran population numbered 5.7 million, or **21.7%** of America's veteran population. Those numbers were exceeded only by Vietnam War and Vietnam era veterans which numbered **8.4 million**, comprising **31.7%** of our Nation's veteran population. The average age of these, our largest block of living veterans (those who served from 1964–1975) presently averages **61.3** years of age. Within a decade the Vietnam veterans, following closely behind the loss of nearly all of our World War II and our **4 million** Korean war veterans, will be faced

with Veterans cemeteries that have reached capacity and closed to further burial. This will be especially significant in the Southern Colorado Region which boasts one of the largest Vietnam veteran populations in America. As previously noted, Colorado Springs has the **3rd highest** percentage of Vietnam Veterans of any of our country's 250 largest cities. Other areas of Southern Colorado are also populated by large segments of the Vietnam War era veterans. (During that war the city of Pueblo lost 58 of its hometown heroes, a death toll numerically exceeded only by Denver. While comprising only 5% of Colorado's total populace in 1970, Pueblo alone suffered 10% of the state's Vietnam War casualties. Colorado Springs had the third-highest number of Vietnam War casualties, with 46 local heroes killed in that war.)

CONCLUSIONS

The need for a Veterans cemetery to serve the Southern Colorado Region is obvious.

1. This region has proportionally one of the highest percentages of veterans in America.
2. Both geographically and demographically, the vast majority of the veterans in this region and their families are located far beyond the catchment area of any existing veterans cemetery.
3. Fort Logan National Cemetery, which borders a limited number of these affected areas is already addressing the demands of eight of Colorado's ten largest cities and will likely reach capacity within little more than a decade.
4. Establishment of a national Veterans Cemetery in the Southern Colorado Region is not only practical to addressing future capacity problems at Fort Logan and expansion and development at Fort Lyon, it is the RIGHT THING TO DO for a population that has answered the call to duty in admirable numbers.

The VA's goal of locating Veterans cemeteries within a 75-mile radius of a hero's hometown, or that of the family which remembers and honors that veteran, is NOT being met for tens of thousands of military veterans in Southern Colorado. This can and should be addressed by construction of a national Veterans Cemetery in the Southern Colorado Region.

Furthermore, there are few areas in America that better exemplify the stated vision of the National Cemetery Administration that: *"Every national cemetery will be a place that inspires visitors to understand and appreciate the service and sacrifice of our Nation's veterans."*

The Pikes Peak region is not only inspirational with its high mountains and natural wonders, it is home to the U.S. Air Force Academy, the proud tradition of the "Mountain Post" at Fort Carson, and many other facilities where young men and women continue a tradition of service that dates back to the Revolutionary War. The patriarch of Colorado Springs, William Jackson Palmer, was in fact a recipient of the Medal of Honor for his heroic leadership in the War Between the States, and chose regularly to reunite the men of his regiment at his mountain residence in the decades that followed the war.

Pueblo has a history of service and valor that can be matched by few cities in America. In traditions of the G.A.R. following the War Between the States which inspired programs of reverence for our military veterans, Pueblo is home to multiple veterans memorials and regularly hosts public, patriotic programs to honor and remember our heroes.

Florence, Colorado, just 30 miles south of Colorado Springs and 25 miles west of Pueblo is named for the wife of Navy Commodore Byron McCandless, a hero of World War I who later designed the Flag of our Commander in Chief, as well as the Presidential Seal. His son became one of the great heroes of World War II, earning the Medal of Honor, and his own son, Bruce McCandless, II, continued that tradition of service as a Naval Officer and NASA astronaut, becoming the first man to walk in space untethered.

Such accounts of service, sacrifice, and heroism abound in the Southern Colorado Region, a largely rural area with deeply rooted traditions of military service. There can be few places so emotionally inspiring and few locations with more awe-inspiring landscape as this area of our Nation.

Indeed as a veteran myself, I can think of few places I would rather someday lie than beneath the towering mountains from which more than a century ago Katharine Lee Bates looked down and, personally inspired by what she saw, penned the words that mean so much to every American veteran: **"America the Beautiful."**

Prepared Statement of Hon. Jeff Chostner, Colonel, USAF (Ret.), Commissioner, Pueblo County Board of Commissioners, Pueblo, CO

Board of Pueblo County Commissioners,
Pueblo, CO.
May 1, 2008

The Honorable John J. Hall
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
335 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Hall:

I am writing to you with regard to the location of a Veterans Cemetery in the Southern Colorado region. I have been involved in this matter since 2003, as a former member of the Pueblo, Colorado, City Council, Chairman of the Greater Pueblo Chamber of Commerce Military Affairs Committee, President of the Air Force Association (Mel Harmon Chapter) and the American Legion.

In my view it is imperative that a new Veterans Cemetery established in Southern Colorado—by that, I mean in a location south of the City of Colorado Springs, and preferably in Pueblo County. As you know the closest Veterans Cemetery is Ft. Logan National Cemetery, located in the Denver metro area. This is a fine facility and one of which we are all proud. However, it is my understanding that Ft. Logan is nearing capacity and there is a pressing need to establish another Veterans Cemetery, either as an adjunct to Ft. Logan or a new cemetery. I have also been informed that there are different Veterans Administration regulations based on the status of the cemetery. Under either criteria, however, we were dismayed to learn that the Veterans Administration has recommended a veterans cemetery between Colorado Springs and Denver. None of the participants to the discussion of location envisioned a cemetery north of Colorado Springs; all believed it should be south of Colorado Springs.

I would urge that you review the current Veterans Administration's regulations regarding status of Veteran Cemeteries and how said status defines the geographical areas in which they may be placed. In my view, the current regulations do not sufficiently take into account location of other existing veteran cemeteries and the ability of other concentrations of veterans to avail themselves of the right to burial in a national cemetery.

This discrepancy is most apparent in the matter before your sub-Committee, in that the next closest Veterans Cemetery is in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The distance between Ft. Logan and the Santa Fe cemetery is approximately 400 miles. Yet instead of proposing a cemetery that would either be more geographically central to the area, or closer for other veterans in the region, the Veterans Administration recommends a new cemetery in close proximity to the existing one. While it will provide more capacity, it does not allow for more convenience or availability to the regions veterans.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak before the Committee, and look forward to discussing the matter further on May 2, 2008, in Colorado Springs.

Sincerely,

Colonel J. E. Chostner, USAF (Ret.)
Commissioner

Prepared Statement of Hon. William F. Tuerk, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, National Cemetery Administration, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on VA's national cemetery construction policy and how the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) is working with Congress to meet veterans' and their families' burial needs, an issue of great interest to Colorado veterans.

One of NCA's four statutory missions under title 38, United States Code, is to provide burial for eligible veterans and their eligible dependents, and to maintain those places of burial as national shrines.

NCA currently maintains more than 2.8 million gravesites at 125 national cemeteries in 39 States and Puerto Rico, as well as 33 soldiers' lots and monument sites. Since 1973, when Congress created a National Cemetery System under the jurisdiction of VA, annual interments in VA national cemeteries have almost tripled from 36,400 to about 100,200 in FY 2007. (We expect to perform nearly 103,000 interments in 2008, a 2.3 percent increase over the number performed in 2007.) Additionally, 69 State veterans cemeteries funded under the State Cemetery Grants Program are operated in 35 States, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

NCA is experiencing an unparalleled expansion that will help to ensure veterans are served with a burial option in a national or State veterans cemetery within a reasonable distance of their home. The Veterans Millennium Healthcare and Benefits Act of 1999 mandated reports that have served as valuable tools for the Department by providing data for use in our planning processes. Armed with the data generated by these reports, we have been able to plan effectively to meet the burial needs of veterans.

We seek to maintain the highest level of service to our veterans. VA's goal is to increase service delivery by providing more veterans with reasonable access to a burial option (whether for casketed or cremated remains) in a national or State veterans cemetery within 75 miles of their residence. VA's current policy is to locate national cemeteries in areas with the largest concentration of *unserved* veterans. VA and Congress have determined that new national cemeteries will be established in areas with an *unserved* veteran population threshold of 170,000 within a 75-mile service radius. This policy has enabled VA to focus resources on serving areas in which high concentrations of veterans do not have access to a burial option.

Currently, over 83 percent of all veterans in the Nation reside within a 75-mile radius of a national or State veterans cemetery. NCA intends to increase the percentage of veterans served to 90 percent by FY 2010. Strategic initiatives are in place to meet this goal. They are:

- Establishment of additional national cemeteries in unserved areas;
- Expansion of existing national cemeteries to provide continued service; and
- Establishment or expansion of State veterans cemeteries through the State Cemetery Grants Program.

Future Burial Needs, Volume 1 of the Millennium Act report, completed in 2002, is the most recent demographic study to assist the National Cemetery Administration in its long-range planning. This report assessed the number of additional cemeteries needed to ensure that 90 percent of veterans live within 75 miles of a national or State veterans cemetery, and identified 31 locations with the greatest concentration of unmet need for burial spaces. In June 2003, VA transmitted to Congress revised veteran population estimates, based on 2000 United States Census data, for all locations identified in the report. From these two listings, 12 locations were identified as having the greatest number of veterans with unserved burial need; all met VA's veteran population threshold of 170,000 for planning new national cemeteries. Public Law 106–117 and Public Law 108–109, in tandem, mandated that NCA construct new national cemeteries in locations identified as having the greatest need. These locations included Atlanta, Georgia; Detroit, Michigan; Ft. Sill (Oklahoma City), Oklahoma; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Sacramento, California; south Florida (Miami); Bakersfield, California; Birmingham, Alabama; Columbia/Greenville, South Carolina; Jacksonville, Florida; Southeastern Pennsylvania; and Sarasota County, Florida.

Currently, Colorado has two national cemeteries, Ft. Logan and Ft. Lyon National Cemeteries, and one VA-funded State veterans cemetery, Veterans Memorial Cemetery of Western Colorado in Grand Junction. The vast majority of veterans who reside in the Colorado Springs area are currently served by either Ft. Logan National Cemetery or Ft. Lyon National Cemetery. Currently, NCA projects that Ft. Logan National Cemetery will have casket and cremation burial space available until approximately 2019. Unfortunately, there is no land contiguous to the existing cemetery to purchase for future gravesite development. Ft. Lyon National Cemetery will have casket and cremation burial space available beyond 2030.

As I testified this February before the full House Veterans' Affairs Committee, the Denver and Colorado Springs area currently served by Ft. Logan National Cemetery has a significant number of veterans, well beyond our 170,000 criterion. It appears that Ft. Logan National Cemetery is one of the next large cemeteries that will reach capacity on its current acreage. If our FY 2009 budget request is approved, we will be able to undertake a new expedited land acquisition process. That new process will greatly assist us in providing a successor cemetery to Ft. Logan National Ceme-

tery and ensuring there will not be a lapse in service for the veterans in the Denver/Colorado Springs area.

The cost of establishing a new cemetery is considerable. Based on recent experience, the cost for establishing new national cemeteries ranges from $500,000 to $750,000 for environmental compliance requirements; $1 million to $2 million for master planning and design; $1 million to $2 million for construction document preparation; $5 million to $10 million for land acquisition, if required; and $20 million to $30 million for construction. The average annual cost for operating a new national cemetery ranges from $1 million to $2 million. Until Ft. Logan National Cemetery can no longer meet the burial needs of the region, all veterans residing within 75 miles are considered served, and VA national cemetery resources will be directed to planning a successor national cemetery.

The State Cemetery Grants Program, vital to achieving NCA's burial access goal and permitting NCA to meet the needs of veterans in less populated areas where the concentration of veterans cannot meet NCA's criterion for the establishment of a national cemetery, can provide additional burial options for Colorado veterans. Through this program, VA may provide up to 100 percent of the cost of improvements in establishing a State veterans cemetery, including the cost of initial equipment to operate the cemetery. VA worked with Colorado officials in providing more than $6 million to establish the State veterans cemetery in Grand Junction and would be pleased to assist the State in exploring this option for the Colorado Springs region.

As the National Cemetery Administration proceeds with construction of the last 6 of the 12 new national cemeteries mandated by Congress, and as it continues to provide grants to the States for construction of State veterans cemeteries, we believe it is time to reassess current policies and to think strategically about how we will meet the needs of veterans in the future. To do this, VA has commissioned an independent program evaluation of all burial benefits. The evaluation will address issues such as:

- Assessment of VA's current access policies to include the 75-mile service area standard;
- Adequacy of the 170,000 veteran population threshold for planning new national cemeteries; and
- Factors influencing veterans' burial choices such as cremation-only burial sites, mausoleums, distance and driving time to a national or State cemetery, family practices, religious affiliation and generational differences.

Following receipt of the report, the Secretary will assess current planning practices and recommend any new strategic goals, policy direction, and planning standards that will position the Department to continue to meet veterans' burial needs in the future. We will be pleased to share this program evaluation study with the Congress this summer.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to share with you an overview of NCA's cemetery construction policy and efforts. I look forward to working with the members of this Subcommittee as we jointly meet the burial needs of the veterans we are trusted to serve. I would be pleased to answer any questions.

Statement of Hon. Mark Udall,
a Representative in Congress from the State of Colorado

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, thank you for holding this hearing to discuss the VA National Cemetery Administration's policies for providing the respectful final resting places that our veterans so deserve. I regret that a conflict in scheduling makes it impossible for me to attend this field hearing and express my appreciation and concerns in person.

In three weeks, we will honor those who made the ultimate sacrifice in defending our Nation, as we celebrate Memorial Day weekend. On that weekend, friends and family members of our departed veterans will visit VA cemeteries throughout the country to honor the memory of their loved ones. Unfortunately, far too many family members will have to travel far too many miles to pay their respects. Even worse, the long distance that some veterans' survivors must travel will prevent them from making the trip at all.

It is particularly appropriate that this field hearing is being held in Colorado Springs. Southern Colorado's population features one of the highest concentrations of veterans in the nation, yet the vast majority of veterans in southern Colorado are

located far outside a 75-mile radius of the nearest VA cemeteries, Fort Logan National Cemetery in Denver and Fort Lyon National Cemetery in Bent County.

For nearly a decade, it has been a goal of the Pikes Peak Veterans Cemetery Committee, as well as the Department of Colorado Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Colorado chapters of the American Legion, the Paralyzed Veterans of America, and the Association for Service Disabled Veterans, to bring a National Cemetery to El Paso County. Last year, my colleague in the Colorado delegation, Representative John Salazar, introduced legislation that would address this issue. It was my honor to join Ranking Member Lamborn and our fellow Colorado Representatives Ed Perlmutter, Diana DeGette and Marilyn Musgrave in cosponsoring Congressman Salazar's bill.

That bill, H.R. 1660, passed the House of Representatives unanimously by voice vote, highlighting the support southern Colorado veterans have received from the entire Nation for the establishment of a VA cemetery in El Paso County. Unfortunately, this bill has seen no legislative action in the Senate. Hopefully, this hearing will raise awareness of the need for a new national cemetery for southern Colorado, so that we can ensure all of our veterans receive the recognition they deserve with a final resting place close to their own communities.

Again, Mr. Chairman and Committee Members, thank you for holding this hearing and addressing the concerns of our Nation's honorable veterans.

A NATIONAL VETERANS CEMETERY FOR THE PIKES PEAK REGION
A REPORT ON THE PIKES PEAK REGION VETERANS' CEMETERY PROJECT

Prepared For: The Pikes Peak Veterans' Cemetery Committee

Acknowledgements: Technical assistance provided by the Integrated Resources Division, Colorado Springs Utilities

Authorization to use extracts from the Eastern El Paso County map sheet provided by MACVAN, The Map Company, 929 West Colorado Avenue, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80905

"It's all for the Veterans"
October 2007

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Section 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 General

A cemetery for veterans does not appear magically just because of popular demand or because of a demonstrated need for one. Rather, such a cemetery, whether funded by the U.S. Government or the state government, will be established only after many hours and often many years of diligent work by dedicated individuals willing to devote their time, energy and frequently their personal funds to completion of the project. The report which follows provides an account of work by a committee of concerned veterans, working through and with their elected representatives, to secure a National Veterans Cemetery for the Pikes Peak region.

The purpose of this report is to:

- Present a review of the work which has been accomplished to obtain a veterans cemetery in the Pikes Peak Region
- Inform and obtain the support of the general public and other interested parties and organizations of the need for such a cemetery
- Identify tasks that must be accomplished in preparation for establishment of a veterans cemetery in the Pikes Peak Region

Note: The term, "Pikes Peak Region" as used throughout this report refers to the 35 counties located in what can be described in general terms as the southeast quadrant of the State of Colorado.

1.2 Background

The origin of the idea for a veterans' cemetery in the Pikes Peak Region can be traced to LTG Forester, a former commander of Fort Carson, who raised the issue during the 1990–1991 timeframe. Further interest in the idea was expressed during the mid and late 1990s, within the local chapter of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) and The Retired Enlisted Association (TREA). Subsequently, both Senator Allard and Representative Hefley introduced bills in their respective houses of Congress seeking a National Veterans Cemetery in the Colorado Springs area. Action on both bills ended in 2000, however, when the Veterans Administration announced there were requests for six other cemeteries across the United States considered to be more essential as well as being mandated by the Congress.

1.3 Recent Congressional Actions

Representative Hefley with other members of the Colorado congressional delegation introduced a new bill (H.R. 4907) on March 8, 2006, to direct the Secretary of the Veterans Affairs to establish a national cemetery for veterans in the Pikes Peak Region. Senators Allard and Salazar introduced a similar bill in the Senate (S. 2387)

Senator Salazar has written a number of letters to the Department of Veterans Affairs setting forth his support for a regional veterans' cemetery. His first letter, in April 2005, gave reasons for questioning the relevancy of the VA's objections in 2000 to establishment of a regional cemetery. Subsequently, Senator Salazar wrote to the VA Undersecretary for Memorial Affairs and cited a number of unique factors that should be addressed by VA guidelines for placing veterans' cemeteries. These unique factors, as they pertain to the Pikes Peak Region, include:

- **Future Growth:** The current VA guideline sets a threshold population of 170,000 veterans in a region to create a new cemetery. This guideline does not account for the future growth, which should include projected troop increases at Fort Carson, which is likely to grow larger in coming years. Growth projections create a different picture of the military and veterans' presence in the Pikes Peak Region than does VA's most recent evaluation.
- **Travel Time vs. Travel Distance:** Colorado Springs is within 75 miles of Denver (straight line distance) but due to traffic it can take more than two hours to travel between the two cities. VA guidelines should reflect such considerations.
- **Cultural Realities of Colorado:** Even though Denver and Colorado Springs are relatively close geographically the community of Colorado Springs is the "center of gravity" for military and veterans affairs within the state and represents the people and communities of southern and southeastern parts of Colorado together with counties in the San Luis Valley, the Arkansas River Region and the Eastern Plains.

Project Coordination and Support

Concurrent with meeting and discussions with Members of Congress, the Department of Veterans Affairs and officials at the State and local levels, members of the Committee have worked to enlist the support of other veterans' organizations as well as civic organizations in the civilian community. These organizations are listed at Table 1.1, below.

Table 1.1—Advocates for a Regional VA Cemetery

Colorado Congressional Delegation
The Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs
The United Veterans Committee of Colorado
El Paso County Commissioners
Fremont County Commissioners
Colorado Springs City Council
Pueblo City Council
City of Fountain City Council
The Military Affairs Council of the Colorado Springs
Chamber of Commerce
Fort Carson Encroachment Committee
Military Officers Association of America
Chapter One of the Retired Enlisted Association
The Armed Forces Top Enlisted Association
Pikes Peak Veterans Council (with 41 member organizations)
Pueblo Veterans Council (with over 12 member organizations)

Section 2
REGIONAL DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

2.1 General

In a statement to the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs former Congressman Joel Hefley observed that demographics are the primary driver in determining the scope and level of investments at the National Cemetery Administration level. In looking to the future, veteran deaths will peak in 2008 at 676,000 with a slow decline thereafter to an estimated 672,000 veteran deaths in 2010. Concurrently, annual internments can be expected to increase from 93,000 in 2004 to approximately 114,700 in 2010 as new national cemeteries are established. [1]

2.2 Data Baseline

Accepting the validity of Congressman Hefley's comment that demographics are the primary driver in determining the scope and level of investments at National Cemetery Administration facilities, a review of the demographic data pertaining to the 35-county region's veteran population is warranted. The principal source of data for this examination is the year 2000 U.S. Government census report for Colorado. As tabulated on Table 2.1, below, there were 155,501 veterans in the 35-county region in the year 2000.

Under existing Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) guidelines a population of 170,000 veterans in a region is required to justify creation of a new cemetery. From the population data, above, the number of veterans in the region as of the year 2000 was not sufficient for such a project. However, DVA guidelines do not account for future growth, which, in the case of the Pikes Peak Region is quite likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

The most significant factor contributing to continuation of the population increase is the presence of the large military population assigned to Fort Carson, Peterson Air Force Base, Schriever Air Force Base, Cheyenne Mountain Air Force Station and the Air Force Academy. These installations are home to about 33,000 active duty military personnel with an estimated increase of another 5,000 soldiers at Fort Carson within the next two years—according to recent estimates. [2]

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[1] Statement by Congressman Joel Hefley, R–CO, to the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee on June 23, 2005

[2] *Military Facts for Fiscal Year 2005,* by the Greater Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce, 2005

Table 2.1—35-County Veteran Population Data*

County Name	Number of Veterans	County Name	Number of Veterans	County Name	Number of Veterans
Alamosa	1,280	Fremont	7,788	Montrose	3,936
Archuleta	1,205	Gunnison	1,150	Otero	2,339
Baca	462	Hinsdale	78	Ouray	471
Chaffee	2,238	Huerfano	1,176	Park	2,126
Cheyenne	191	Kiowa	159	Pitkin	1,113
Conejos	750	Kit Carson	817	Prowers	1,037
Costilla	394	La Plata	4,290	Pueblo	17,600
Crowley	758	Las Animas	1,844	Saguache	550
Custer	594	Lincoln	736	San Juan	88
Delta	3,832	Mesa	14,908	San Miguel	478
Dolores	217	Mineral	115	Teller	3,014
El Paso	74,992	Montezuma	2,775	—	—
Total Vets	**86,913**	**Total Vets**	**35,836**	**Total Vets**	**32,752**
Grand Total Veterans	**155,501**				

*Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veteran Data, Census 2000, Colorado by County & Period of Service.

2.3 Potential for Growth

A comparison of the Census 1990 veteran population with the Census 2000 data for the State of Colorado shows an 8.9% increase in the total number of veterans during that ten year period (409,932 veterans growing by 36,453 to 446,385 veterans). Using this same growth data and assuming the number of veterans in the 35-county region will increase at the same rate it is possible to estimate the regional veteran population by the year 2010, namely, 155,501 veterans in 2000 multiplied by 1.089% equates to 169,340 in 2010 which is within a few hundred individuals of the 170,000 veteran threshold required under the DVA guidelines.[3] (See Appendix A for Bureau of the Census population data)

2.4 Summary

This examination of the potential for growth within the Pikes Peak Region was conducted to provide an estimate of the veteran population at the end of the 2000–2010 decade. With an assumed continuation of the 8.9 percent growth rate experienced within Colorado during the previous ten-year period, a regional population of 169,000 + veterans can be projected realistically.

Section 3
CREATING A NATIONAL CEMETERY

3.1 General

The Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) creates a new national cemetery through a six-step process with each step requiring that congressionally approved funds be available. The general process which is provided in a DVA Public and Intergovernmental Affairs fact sheet will be summarized in this section (A copy of the fact sheet is at Appendix B).

This summary provides an overview of the different steps with the purpose being to promote an understanding of the process with emphasis upon the relationship between the activities of the Pikes Peak Veterans Cemetery Committee and other government agencies.

[3] U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Census 1990 vs. Census 2000 Veteran Population In the U.S. and Puerto Rico

The six steps consist of: site selection, environmental assessment, land acquisition, master planning and design development, preparation of construction documents and, lastly, the actual construction.

3.2 Site Selection

The process begins with identification of a geographic area with a large veteran population unserved by a national or state cemetery. Size of the cemetery and the number of gravesites will be determined by demographic forecasts. Criteria for site selection include: accessibility, available utilities and water, surrounding land use, soil topography and shape, aesthetics in terms of appearance and restrictions to development and other factors such as the presence of endangered species and mineral rights or easements. Two to five sites are identified.

3.3 Environmental Assessment

An environmental assessment document must be prepared for the selected site to ensure compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act.[4]

3.4 Land Acquisition

Land can be acquired by donation, by purchase or through transfer of federal or state land to the VA. The value for land which is purchased is established through a real-property appraisal. The Department of Justice reviews all of the related real property documentation to ensure the contract and title meet requirements for legal transfer of the property.

3.5 Master Planning and Design Development

After the VA takes title to the land, contract bids are solicited for design of the new cemetery. The winning contractor prepares a master plan for development of all phases of the cemetery which is followed by more detailed designs for the separate phases of construction. The first phase usually includes the first active burial section with the necessary infrastructure for operation of the cemetery. The later phases of construction typically include new burial sections, with associated infrastructure, designed to provide burial space for ten years.

3.6 Contract Document Preparation

Under a second negotiated contact the contractor prepares plans and specifications that detail all aspects of the phase-one construction; e.g., active burial sections, administrative and maintenance buildings, a public information center, committal shelters and roads. The documents provide the basis for project construction bids.

3.7 Construction Award and Completion

Following completion of the first five steps in the process the VA solicits bids and awards a contract for construction of the new cemetery. This process usually takes about four months but the actual construction of Phase 1 takes approximately 24 months. In fact, to complete each phase, land purchases and construction will require multiple congressional appropriations over several years' budgets.

Beginning with selection of the site, through the environmental assessment, master planning, design and Phase 1 construction steps, the process requires about five years for completion. The follow-on phases of construction will occur over a period of many years driven to a large degree by the requirements for burials.

3.8 The Committee's Role in the Creation Process

Although the Committee does not have an official standing in the sense that its actions represent the position of or are conducted under the authority of a legally constituted organization it does, however, have a role in the creation of a new cemetery by virtue of its contacts with Members of Congress, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, state and local governments, the regional veterans groups and the public at large. There are at least three areas in which the Committee serves actively in its role as a voice for the regional veterans—individually and collectively.

- The first area in which the Committee has played and continues to play a significant role in the DVA's six-step process lies in the identification of an area with a large veteran population unserved (perhaps inadequately served) by a

[4] **Fact Sheet: How a VA National Cemetery is Created,** United States Department of Veterans Affairs, Public and Intergovernmental Affairs, April 2005 The assessment must result in a finding of no significant impact for the site to be considered. Upon receipt of a positive finding, the VA makes the results available to the public for a 30-day comment period. After the comment period VA officials make a recommendation to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs who decides whether to acquire the property.

state or national cemetery. The Committee's principal reason for organizing was to focus the attention of the DVA and the Colorado congressional delegation on the need for a veterans' cemetery in the Pikes Peak Region.

- The second area in which the Committee plays a role in the process is through its contacts with the Colorado congressional delegation. As indicated in Section 1, members of the Committee have been quite persuasive in discussions with members of congress regarding the need for action at the congressional level to introduce the bills necessary to obtain the proper funding.
- The third area in which the Committee has been active is the identification and survey of potential sites for a cemetery. These surveys have been successful in locating sites with the physical characteristics required by the DVA. The next section will provide the results of the Committee's surveys.

3.9 Summary

The summarization of the DVA's six-step process in creating a national cemetery was provided to promote an appreciation for the activities and events that must take place before a cemetery is fully functional. It is evident from the review of the process that: (a) creation of a National cemetery will require several years and (b) at each step funding must be provided.

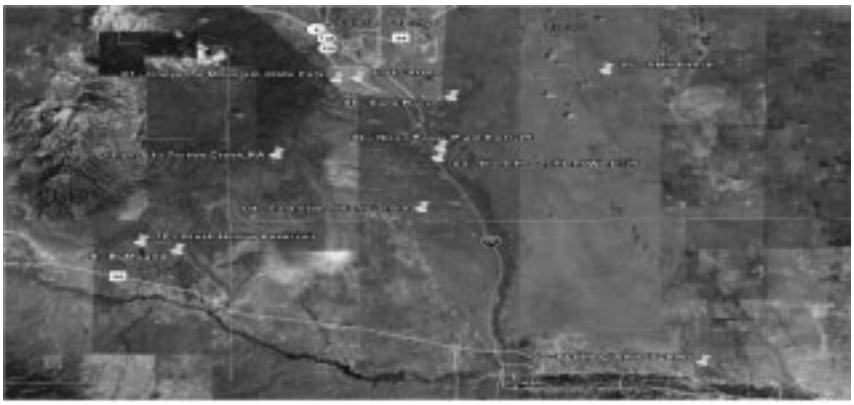
Section 4
POTENTIAL CEMETERY SITES

4.1 General

In addition to their meetings, briefings and discussions regarding the cemetery, members of the Committee have also been involved in researching information associated with the physical attributes of the cemetery while locating and visiting potential sites. Committee members gave particular attention to the factors listed below during the site surveys.

- **Location:** The location should be outside the 75 mile radius from the Fort Logan National Cemetery and be accessible from Interstate 25 or one of the primary state highways. Land for the site should be on state or federal property or on property that could be obtained through donation, land-swap or outright purchase.
- **Acreage Requirements:** Using the standards established by the DVA for fifty or more years of burials, the requirement for a veterans cemetery in the Pikes Peak Region would be 200–250 acres. The surveyed sites met or have the capacity for exceeding the acreage requirement.
- **Water Requirements:** Based upon calculations provided by the Colorado Springs Utilities office, using an estimate of 50-acre additions every ten years, the calculations indicated a requirement of approximately 18 acre-feet per 50 acres per year.
- **Other Factors:** During the surveys the topography and the aesthetics of each site were considered in terms of suitability for use as a cemetery. The feasibility of using the site was also noted but no definitive information was developed at the time.

Ten potential sites have been identified and a general survey of each site was conducted. The results of the individual surveys, together with the related graphic illustrations, follow. There is no particular priority to the order in which the sites are presented.



Area map of potential cemetery sites

Figure 4.1—Cemetery Site Evaluation and Ranking Procedure

Required Feature	Cheyenne Mt State Park	Nixon Pwr Plant E of I–25	Nixon Pwr Plant W of I–25	East Side Fort Carson	Entrance to Turkey Creek RA	RMK Ranch	Pueblo Chemical Depot	Kane Ranch	BLM Land	Brush Hollow Reservoir
Water supply [1]	4	5	5	1	4	5	5	4	1	5
Access To Site [2]	5	3	4	1	5	1	3	4	3	2
On-site Acreage [3]	4	4	4	4	4	3	5	4	1	5
Land Ownership [4]	5	4	3	1	4	2	5	5	5	4
Topography [5]	4	3	3	2	5	4	5	5	1	4
Aesthetics [6]	5	4	1	1	4	3	3	4	1	4
Feasibility [7]	5	4	2	3	4	3	3	5	3	2
Total Score	**32**	**27**	**22**	**13**	**30**	**21**	**29**	**31**	**15**	**26**

Notes:
1. Figure 4.1.1 Cemetery Site Ranking Procedure—Water
2. Figure 4.1.2 Cemetery Site Ranking Procedure—Accessibility
3. Figure 4.1.3 Cemetery Site Ranking Procedure—Acreage
4. Figure 4.1.4 Cemetery Site Ranking Procedure—Land Ownership
5. Figure 4.1.5 Cemetery Site Ranking Procedure—Topography
6. Figure 4.1.6 Cemetery Site Ranking Procedure—Aesthetics
7. Figure 4.1.7 Cemetery Site Ranking Procedure—Feasibility

Figure 4.1.1—Cemetery Site Ranking Procedure—Water

Criteria: Water availability

Ranking Position:

5—Available on-site in quantity required by DVA. Dependability of supply has been determined and confirmed.
4—Available on-site in quantity required by DVA but dependability of supply has not been confirmed.
3—Available on-site but quantity and dependability of supply must be determined.
2—Not currently available on-site but evidence indicates a supply can be provided from an offsite source.
1—Not available on-site. Whether an adequate supply can be provided from an on or offsite source must be determined.

Figure 4.1.2—Cemetery Site Ranking Procedure—Accessibility

Criteria: Accessibility

Ranking Position:

5—Interstate or National highway not more than one mile from the site. Little, if any road construction required to provide access to the site. Required exit ramps/interchanges exist.
4—Interstate or National or 2–4 lane State highways more than one mile from the site. Little, if any road construction required to provide access to the site. Required exit ramps/interchanges exist.
3—National highway or 2–4 lane State highway not more than one mile from the site. Feasibility of providing an exit ramp from the highway must be determined.
2—National highway or 2–4 lane State highway not more one mile from the site. Feasibility of providing an exit from the highway must be determined.
1—County road, one-half mile or more in length, provides sole access to the site or extensive road construction would be required to provide adequate site access.

Figure 4.1.3—Cemetery Site Ranking Procedure—Acreage

Criteria: On-site Acreage

Ranking Position:

5—Minimum of 500 acres available on-site.
4—Minimum of 400 acres available on-site.
3—Minimum of 300 acres available on site.
2—Minimum of 200 acres available on-site.
1—Approximately 100 acres on-site.

Figure 4.1.4—Cemetery Site Ranking Procedure—Land Ownership

Criteria: Land Ownership

Ranking Position:

5—Owned by Federal, State or Local Government. Could be transferred to VA without cost.
4—Owned by private individual, estate or corporation. Could be transferred to VA without cost.
3—Owned by private individual, estate or corporation. Could be transferred to VA with modest cost.
2—Owned by private individual, estate or corporation. Could be transferred to VA but at significant cost.
1—Determination of actual ownership not established or unwillingness of owner to transfer land to VA is uncertain.

Figure 4.1.5—Cemetery Site Ranking Procedure—Topography

Feature: Topography—Identification of the landforms associated with the various cemetery sites.

Ranking Position:

5—Alluvial Plain: Formed from deposits of Earth material from a higher elevation onto flatter land. Presents a relatively even surface which facilitates

construction, access and grounds maintenance. Construction costs relatively low.

4—Valley: A low area between hills and/or mountains where a stream may flow. Valley floors frequently dissected by ravines caused by erosion which can increase costs in site preparation. Construction costs modest due to topography.

3—Plains: Low areas of the Earth which have been eroded nearly level or formed of flat lying sediments. Surface areas generally favorable for site preparation, construction and grounds maintenance. Construction costs relatively low due to the topography.

2—Hill: An isolated elevation in the land, usually no more than 30 meters from base to peak. Access, ease of construction and maintenance of the site depends largely upon the degree of hillside slopes. Construction costs can be significant due to topography.

1—No dominate landform: An individual site may include a mixture of landforms, for example, partially alluvial plain with low hills intermixed, bordering on a valley area. Construction costs most significant due to topography.

Figure 4.1.6—Cemetery Site Ranking Procedure—Aesthetics

Criteria: Aesthetics

Ranking Position:

5—Site has immediate visual appeal. Topography and surrounding land use is suitable for cemetery development. High hills or mountains covered with trees and other natural vegetation form a back drop with gentle slopes to lower ground. Free from distracting visual or noise pollutants. An excellent location.

4—Site consists of generally level ground with no abrupt landforms and a natural drainage slope. Topography and surrounding land use is compatible with cemetery development. Background consists of tree lines or low hills covered with natural vegetation. Normally free from noise pollutants but low flying aircraft or nearby military or civilian activities may create temporary distractions. A very good location.

3—Site consists of generally flat terrain interspersed with moderate to steep slopes where erosion or man-made damage has occurred. Both the topography and surrounding land use is compatible with cemetery development. Noise from low flying aircraft or nearby military or civilian activities can occur regularly. A suitable location.

2—Site consists of low rolling landforms with natural drainage. Overall, the topography and the surrounding land use is compatible with cemetery development. Natural vegetation is typical of Great Plains ranchlands. Noise or visual pollutants may be factors. A marginally suitable location from an aesthetics perspective.

1—Site consists of generally flat terrain with no distinguishing features. The topography is compatible with cemetery development. Natural vegetation consists primarily of low grass or brush and scattered pinion pine, juniper and/or scrub oak trees. Noise from nearby military or civilian activities may occur periodically. A poor location from an aesthetics perspective.

Figure 4.1.7—Feasibility

Criteria: Feasibility

Ranking Position

5—Site has excellent support.
4—Site has good support.
3—Site has moderate support.
2—Site has fair support.
1—Site has poor support.

4.2 Cheyenne Mountain State Park (Site 1)

Location: The site is located in the Cheyenne Mountain State Park. Access is from State Highway 115.

Water: Available on-site in quantity required by the DVA but the dependability of supply has not been confirmed.

Topography: Suitable for construction of a cemetery.

Acreage: Exact acreage available for the cemetery must be determined but it is estimated that 400+ acres could be made available for the cemetery.

Property Owned By: Cheyenne Mountain State Park, State of Colorado.

Aesthetics: Former ranch land which has been developed into a state park. Cheyenne Mountain provides a majestic backdrop.

Feasibility: Approval of a national cemetery site within the park site will require action at the state level. A factor which should be considered in locating a cemetery within the park is the pending construction of a military museum on the Fort Carson reservation in the vicinity of Gate 1. The three facilities, a veterans' cemetery, a state park and a military museum in close proximity would serve as a strong magnet and a synergistic cultural amenity to all three facilities.

Comments: The location of the property shown on the map is an approximation. A survey will be required to determine an exact location for the cemetery site.

Figure 4.2—Proposed Site # 1, Cheyenne Mountain State Park

Water supply	Access to site	Acreage	Topog-raphy	Land ownership	Aesthetics	Feasibility	Total Score
4	5	4	4	5	5	5	32

4.3 Nixon Power Plant, East Side of I–25 (Site 2)

Location: The site is located on property in the vicinity of the R.D. Nixon power plant, on the east side of I–25, on property owned by the Colorado Springs Utilities (CSU). Access is from Interstate 25.

Water: Water is available from wells owned by CSU.

Acreage: The area under consideration contains sufficient space to create a cemetery of 200–250+ acres. The exact location has not been established.

Topography: Suitable for a cemetery.

Property Owned By: Colorado Springs Utilities.

Aesthetics: The preferred location is on generally level ground which is part of the Clear Spring Ranch site. Overall, the site presents a pleasant appearance.

Feasibility: The property is owned by and under the control of CSU. Use of the property for a veterans cemetery must be determined by that organization.

Comments: The location of the site shown on the map represents only the general area. The exact location must be determined during the detailed site evaluation and selection process.

Figure 4.3—Proposed Site #2, Nixon Power Plant, East of I–25

Water supply	Access to site	Acreage	Topog-raphy	Land ownership	Aesthetics	Feasibility	Total Score
5	3	4	3	4	4	4	27

4.4 Nixon Power Plant, West Side of I–25 (Site 3)

Location: The location for the site is in the vicinity but south of the R.D. Nixon power plant, on the west side of I–25. Access to the site is from Interstate 25.

Water: Water in the quantity required is available. Dependability of the supply has been confirmed.

Acreage: The area under consideration contains a sufficient amount of space to create a cemetery of 200–250 acres. The exact location must await the results of an on-site survey.

Topography: Suitable for construction of a cemetery.

Property Owned By: Colorado Springs Utilities (CSU).

Aesthetics: The site is located on generally level ground with a gentle upward slope on the south and southwest sides; however, it may prove to be located downwind from a planned sewage treat plant.

Feasibility: The property containing the site belongs to CSU and will be available dependant upon the Utility's willingness to sell.

Comments: The site location shown on the map represents only the general area. The precise site location cannot be determined until a specific site survey has been completed.

Figure 4.4—Proposed Site #3, Nixon Power Plant, West of I–25

Water supply	Access to site	Acreage	Topog-raphy	Land ownership	Aesthetics	Feasibility	Total Score
5	4	4	3	3	1	2	22

4.5 East Boundary of Fort Carson (Site 4)

Location: The site is located along the east boundary of Fort Carson and west of I–25. It is identified on some maps as the Frontier Village. Access is from I–25; however, the road into the area is unimproved.

Water: The availability of an adequate supply of water and the source must be determined.

Acreage: The area has a sufficient amount of land to provide 300+ acres but an exact location has not been established.

Topography: Suitable for use as a cemetery but construction costs could be significant.

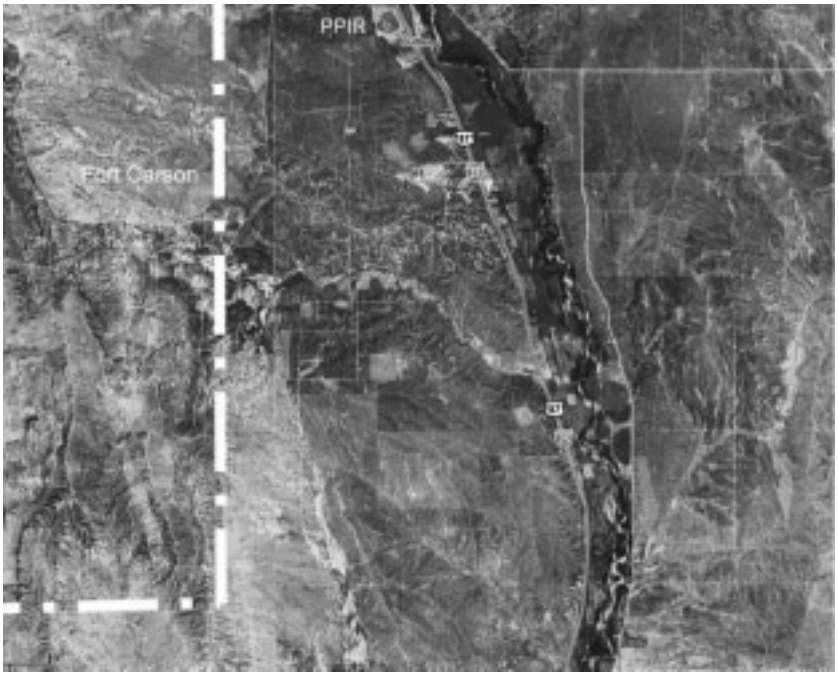
Property Owned By: Private ownership.

Aesthetics: Generally flat, hill-top land. No distinguishing characteristics.

Feasibility: The site is located on private land. Converting it to use as a DVA cemetery must await negotiations with the current owner or owners.

Comments: The area depicted on the aerial photograph of the site shows only the very general location. The precise area must be determined during the site evaluation and selection process.

Figure 4.5—Proposed Site #4, East Boundary of Fort Carson



Water supply	Access to site	Acreage	Topog-raphy	Land ownership	Aesthetics	Feasibility	Total Score
1	1	4	1	2	1	3	13

4.6 Entrance to Turkey Creek Recreation Area (Site 5)

Location: The site is located in the vicinity of the entrance to Fort Carson's Turkey Creek Recreation Area. Access to the site is from State Highway 115.

Water: Water is available in an adequate amount but the dependability of the supply had not been confirmed when this report was prepared.

Acreage: There is a sufficient amount of land in the area to provide 400+ acres for the cemetery.

Topography: Suitable for construction of a cemetery.

Property Owned By: U.S. Government, Fort Carson.

Aesthetics: Location is on a military reservation. The overall appearance is of a rural setting, in a broad valley, with higher tree-covered ground to the northwest and southwest.

Feasibility: It is considered possible for the site to be acquired through an intergovernmental transfer of property.

Comments: The aerial photograph shows an approximation of the space available for the site. The exact site location must be determined.

Figure 4.6—Proposed Site #5, Entrance to Turkey Creek Recreation Area

Water supply	Access to site	Acreage	Topog-raphy	Land ownership	Aesthetics	Feasibility	Total Score
4	5	4	5	4	4	4	30

4.7 RMK Ranch (Site 6)

Location: The ranch is located in El Paso County, southwest of Schreiver AFB. Access is via a gravel road from a state highway.

Water: There are three working wells on the property.

Acreage: The ranch consists of 300 (+/-) acres.

Topography: Suitable for construction of a cemetery.

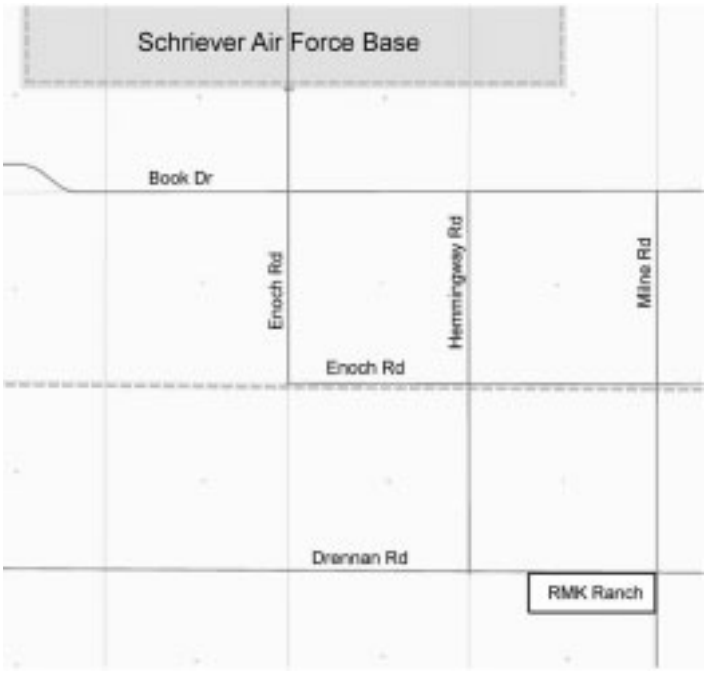
Property Owned By: Privately owned by an Army veteran.

Aesthetics: Gently rolling terrain on the eastern plains of El Paso County.

Feasibility: If the property is to be used as a veterans' cemetery the owner would be willing to sell it for a reasonable price.

Comments: The location shown on the map is an estimate. Facilities on the property include a house, four outbuildings, a large generator and a small cemetery. Land forms shown in the picture are typical of those on the ranch.

Figure 4.7—Proposed Site #6, RMK Ranch



Water supply	Access to site	Acreage	Topog-raphy	Land ownership	Aesthetics	Feasibility	Total Score
5	1	3	4	2	3	3	21

4.8 Pueblo Chemical Depot (Site 7)

Location: The depot is approximately 12 miles east of the City of Pueblo. Access to the depot is from U.S. Highway 50.

Water: Available on-site and dependability of supply has been confirmed.

Acreage: The depot can provide up to 800 acres for the cemetery.

Topography: Suitable for construction of a cemetery.

Property Owned By: U.S. Government, Department of the Army.

Aesthetics: Appropriate for the region.

Feasibility: An area for the cemetery can be provided on the reservation and outside the secure area.

Comments: The location of the site as depicted on the map of the depot is only an approximation.

Figure 4.8—Proposed Site #7, Pueblo Chemical Depot

Water source	Access to site	Acreage	Topog-raphy	Owner-ship	Aesthetics	Feasibility	Total Score
5	3	5	5	5	3	3	29

4.9 Kane Ranch (Site 8)

Location: The site is located in the City of Fountain at the intersection of Link Road and C&S Road. Access can be from either of these two roads.

Water: Water is available from on-site wells but dependability has not been confirmed.

Acreage: The ranch consists of 400 acres, as reported, which can be used for a cemetery.

Topography: Suitable for construction of a cemetery.

Property Owned By: Property was donated to El Paso County for use as a national cemetery.

Aesthetics: Site consists of generally level ground and a natural drainage slope with a potential for a background of trees and natural vegetation. The surrounding land use is compatible with cemetery development.

Feasibility: Ranch may be acquired as a gift from the county for use as a national cemetery.

Figure 4.9—Proposed Site #8, Kane Ranch

Water source	Access to site	Acreage	Topog-raphy	Owner-ship	Aesthetics	Feasibility	Total Score
4	4	4	5	5	4	5	31

4.10 BLM Land (Site 9)

Location: Site is north of the Town of Penrose on the high ground on the west side of Beaver Creek. Access to the property is off of Colorado 115

Water: Not currently available on-site. Whether an adequate supply can be provided from an off-site source must be determined.

Acreage: 100–150 acres are available.

Topography: Marginally suitable for construction of a cemetery as the subsurface consists of fractured shale deepening to semi-solid rock.

Property Owned By: U.S. Government, Bureau of Land Management.

Aesthetics: Site consists of generally flat terrain with no distinguishing features. Natural vegetation consists of low grass or brush and scattered pinion, juniper and scrub oak trees.

Feasibility: Site is located on U.S. Government property. A transfer of property between the DVA and BLM may be possible.

Figure 4.10—Proposed Site #9, BLM Land

Water source	Access to site	Acreage	Topog-raphy	Owner-ship	Aesthetics	Feasibility	Total Score
1	3	1	1	5	1	3	15

4.11 Brush Hollow Reservoir (Site 10)

Location: Site is located on the north-northwest end of the Brush Hollow Reservoir which is located northwest of the Town of Penrose. Access is off of Colorado 115 onto County Road 123 and County Road F42.

Water: Water is available on-site.

Acreage: 250 acres will be made available for a national cemetery.

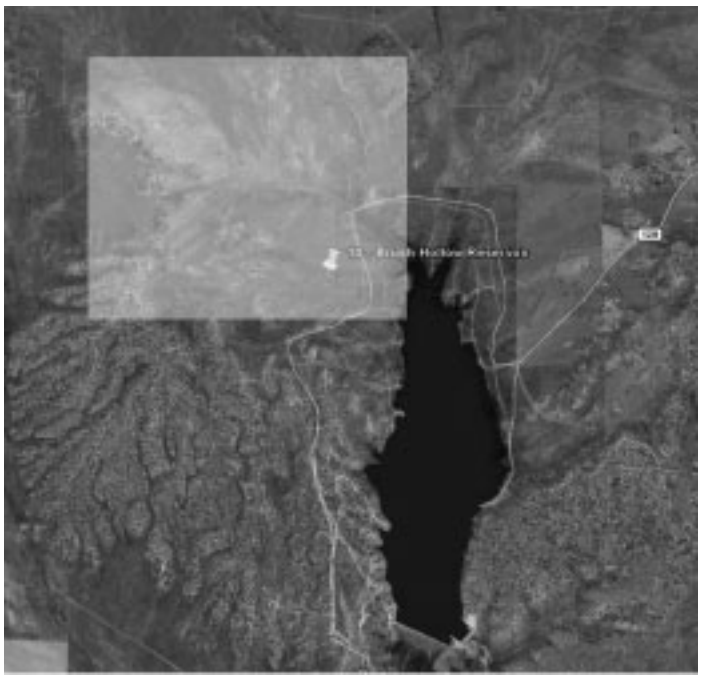
Topography: Suitable for construction of a cemetery.

Property Owned By: Privately owned.

Aesthetics: Site is on generally level and well drained ground with low hills forming a background. Natural vegetation consists of pinion, juniper and scrub oak trees.

Feasibility: Land to be donated if used for a national cemetery.

Figure 4.11—Proposed Site #10, Brush Hollow Reservoir



Water source	Access to site	Acreage	Topog-raphy	Owner-ship	Aesthetics	Feasibility	Total Score
5	2	5	4	4	4	2	26

4.12 Summary

The purpose in this section was to present the results of the Committee's work in identifying potential sites for a veterans' cemetery and the concurrent collection of essential information related to each site. There was no attempt at this point to establish an order of priority of the various sites when considering recommendations to Members of Congress or to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The preliminary information is considered to be sufficient for conducting further research into the suitability of each site. Refinement of the list of potential sites must be an ongoing effort so that credible information can be presented to the U.S. Government and local authorities as well as to the general public.

Section 5
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 General

The need, as well as the desirability, for a national cemetery in the Pikes Peak Region has been recognized for a number of years with some action in that direction in the early 1990s. In the late 1990s members of the Colorado congressional delegation introduced bills in Congress seeking a national veterans cemetery for the region. The bills did not receive favorable consideration when the Veterans Administration announced that six cemeteries were to be constructed across the country—all with a higher priority than the Pikes Peak Region.

5.2 The Department of Veterans Affairs' Position

As a general observation, the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) has not given favorable consideration to locating a national cemetery in the Pikes Peak Region, and within the immediate area of Colorado Springs in particular, for the following reasons.

- The national cemetery at Fort Logan is within 75 miles of Colorado Springs which meets one of the DVA guidelines for providing burial service for veterans a well as other eligible individuals.
- The veteran population within the Pikes Peak Region is not at the level that justifies a national cemetery. Namely, the official Year 2000 census revealed a population of just over 155,000 veterans in the 35-county region. This is below the 170,000 veteran population figure required under the DVA guidelines.
- Previously, the Congress had mandated construction of new national cemeteries in other areas of the country which had a higher priority than did Colorado Springs. This Congressional action has, in effect, tied the DVA's hands.

Another unspoken reason for not locating a national cemetery in the Pikes Peak Region was, and may still be the lack of any ground-swell of public opinion for such a cemetery within the region.

5.3 Counter Arguments to the DVA Guidelines

In view of concerns expressed by members of the Committee to the Colorado congressional delegation regarding the DVA position on a national cemetery for the Pikes Peak Region, Senator Salazar provided his reasons in letters to the DVA questioning that agency's previous objections to establishment of a regional cemetery as well as its guidelines for locating national cemeteries.

Senator Salazar cited a number of unique factors in his correspondence to the Department that should be addressed by VA guidelines. These unique factors, as they pertain to the Pikes Peak Region, include:

- **Growth:** The current VA guideline sets a threshold population of 170,000 veterans in a region to create a new cemetery. This guideline does not account for the future growth, which should include projected troop increases at Fort Carson, which is likely to grow larger in coming years. Growth projections create a different picture of the military and veterans' presence in the Pikes Peak Region than does VA's most recent evaluation.
- **Travel Time vs. Travel Distance:** Colorado Springs is within 75 miles of Denver (straight line distance) but due to traffic it can take more than two hours to travel between the two cities. VA guidelines should reflect such considerations.
- **Cultural Realities of Colorado:** Even though Denver and Colorado Springs are relatively close geographically the community of Colorado Springs is the *"center of gravity"* for military and veterans affairs within the state and represents the people and communities of southern and southeastern parts of Colorado together with counties in the San Luis Valley, the Arkansas River Region and the Eastern Plains.

5.4 Grass Roots Level Actions

Faced with the realities of the DVA position regarding a regional cemetery but also building upon the support provided by the Colorado congressional delegation, the Committee has initiated an active program to obtain a national cemetery in the Pikes Peak Region whether working within or around existing guidelines.

The principal areas in which the Committee has focused its efforts were addressed in section III of this report, specifically:

- The Committee has created awareness in the public sector and at the state and national levels of the need for a national cemetery.
- It has been persuasive in convincing the Colorado congressional delegation to initiate the bills necessary for obtaining funding for the project.
- Potential sites for a cemetery have been explored and surveyed with the results showing that at least ten locations within the region meet the criteria in DVA instructions for a national cemetery.

The Committee's work, as it has been discussed up to this point, is ongoing with refinement of specific projects where so indicated; however, a logical question that can be asked is, "What now—what avenues are open to the Committee in its efforts to secure a national cemetery?"

The foregoing question is particularly acute when one considers the fact that the Committee must rely upon its persuasive ability to accomplish its objects since it has no authority to make binding commitments under the umbrella of a legally constituted organization. Secondly, the DVA position, with its guidelines for the creation of national cemeteries, can become an excuse for doing nothing when viewed as other than just guidance and not as rules that are *". . . chiseled in stone."*

The conclusions and recommendations in the paragraphs below provide a vehicle for responding to the foregoing questions and observations.

5.5 Conclusions

These conclusions pertain specifically to the Pikes Peak Veterans Cemetery Committee, its activities in promoting the need for a national cemetery in the Pikes Peak Region and its efforts to secure such a cemetery following the procedures established by the Department of Veterans Affairs (Note: The order in which the conclusions are listed is not indicative of the relative importance of one over the other).

A. The program or campaign undertaken by the Committee members, collectively and individually, to create awareness within the 35-county regional community of the need for a national cemetery has been successful as evidenced by the organizations that have provided endorsements of the idea.
B. The perceived reluctance on the part of the Department of Veterans Affairs may be attributable, at least in part, to the absence of a ground-swell of public opinion for a regional national cemetery better suited to the needs of the community than the Fort Logan and Fort Lyons cemeteries.
C. The Department of Veterans Affairs guidelines regarding the 170,000 veteran population thresholds and the 75-mile separation distance between national cemeteries do not take conditions into consideration that are peculiar to are unique to a specific area or region.
D. The 170,000 veteran population threshold and the 75-mile separation between national cemeteries guidelines have impacted adversely upon previous efforts to secure a national cemetery in the Pikes Peak Region.
E. In addition to the veteran population threshold and the 75-mile guideline, other conditions may prevail within an area or region which should receive favorable consideration by the Department of Veterans Affairs when judging the merits of requests for national cemeteries; e.g., travel time to reach a cemetery, future growth potential by the population concerned and cultural issues which could, conceivably, determine the extent to which a particular cemetery will be used.
F. The fact that previous actions by the Colorado congressional delegation have not been successful in obtaining funding for a regional cemetery should not be viewed as justification for inaction in the future.

5.6 Recommendations

The recommendations that follow provide a starting point in response to the question, "What do we do now?" while, concurrently, offering a direction of effort to the Committee for future programs.

A. Consider affiliation with a legally organized body with similar objectives as a means for giving more visibility and possibly credibility to the Committee's work to secure a national cemetery in the Pikes Peak Region.
B. Continue to explore and take advantage of opportunities to involve the public in the need for a regional national cemetery.
C. Refine the list of potential cemetery sites in order to give more attention to those with the best characteristics while simultaneously eliminating the sites with the least potential. Acceptance of this recommendation may serve to enhance the organization's credibility when detailed analyses of the selected sites are provided.
D. Provide copies of this report to: the Colorado congressional delegation; to individuals within the Department of Veterans Affairs who influence the selection of national cemetery locations; and to those other organizations and individuals at the state, county and local levels that have an interest in providing this particular service for the veterans not only within the Pikes Peak Region but also to the veterans in all of southern Colorado.

"It's all for the Veterans"

Appendix A
Extract from Census 2000 Veteran Data, Colorado: Veteran Population by Age, by Sex, by County

COLORADO: Veteran Population by Period of Service, by County

State or County Name	Total	August 1990 or later (including Persian Gulf War)			No Vietnam Era Service	
		Served In Vietnam Era	No Vietnam Era service	Total serving August 1990 or later	Served September 1980 or later only	Served prior to September 1980
Colorado	446,385	8,607	58,577	67,184	52,626	5,951
Adams County	34,426	315	4,241	4,556	3,981	260
Alamosa County	1,280	14	138	152	122	16
Arapahoe County	50,669	1,271	7,235	8,506	6,481	754
Archuleta County	1,205	4	39	43	34	5
Baca County	462	0	3	3	0	3
Bent County	808	21	74	95	65	9
Boulder County	22,437	126	2,198	2,324	2,097	101
Chaffee County	2,238	25	135	160	119	16
Cheyenne County	191	0	11	11	11	0
Clear Creek County	1,093	15	66	81	59	7
Conejos County	750	1	35	36	35	0
Costilla County	394	4	16	20	16	0
Crowley County	758	2	96	98	96	0
Custer County	594	7	15	22	15	0
Delta County	3,832	26	149	175	133	16
Denver County	48,558	277	5,760	6,037	5,511	249
Dolores County	217	4	8	12	8	0

COLORADO: Veteran Population by Period of Service, by County—Continued

State or County Name	Total	August 1990 or later (including Persian Gulf War)			No Vietnam Era Service	
		Served In Vietnam Era	No Vietnam Era service	Total serving August 1990 or later	Served September 1980 or later only	Served prior to September 1980
Douglas County	14,712	366	2,239	2,605	2,079	160
Eagle County	2,380	29	277	306	274	3
Elbert County	2,249	18	215	233	182	33
El Paso County	74,992	4,102	18,259	22,361	14,971	3,288
Fremont County	7,788	68	809	877	780	29
Garfield County	4,040	30	356	386	330	26
Gilpin County	617	8	66	74	66	0
Grand County	1,343	14	103	117	93	10
Gunnison County	1,150	6	141	147	133	8
Hinsdale County	78	0	5	5	0	5
Huerfano County	1,176	15	102	117	95	7
Jackson County	194	2	13	15	13	0
Jefferson County	54,875	597	4,950	5,547	4,664	286
Kiowa County	159	5	10	15	10	0
Kit Carson County	817	3	26	29	22	4
Lake County	704	0	88	88	71	17
La Plata County	4,290	18	402	420	397	5
Larimer County	23,269	266	2,536	2,802	2,452	84

Las Animas County	1,844	33	122	155	99	23
Lincoln County	736	9	75	84	64	11
Logan County	2,093	24	173	197	163	10
Mesa County	14,908	104	1,385	1,489	1,316	69
Mineral County	115	0	0	0	0	0
Moffat County	1,514	19	123	142	123	0
Montezuma County	2,775	15	238	253	238	0
Montrose County	3,936	46	347	393	325	22
Morgan County	2,260	18	200	218	200	0
Otero County	2,339	52	218	270	210	8
Ouray County	471	6	7	13	5	2
Park County	2,126	78	244	322	229	15
Phillips County	416	6	17	23	15	2
Pitkin County	1,113	0	57	57	57	0
Prowers County	1,037	13	96	109	96	0
Pueblo County	17,600	182	1,718	1,900	1,577	141
Rio Blanco County	673	0	59	59	57	2
Rio Grande County	1,361	14	124	138	104	20
Routt County	1,555	8	187	195	178	9
Saguache County	550	3	34	37	34	0
San Juan County	88	0	4	4	2	2
San Miguel County	478	0	20	20	18	2
Sedgwick County	346	1	20	21	20	0

COLORADO: Veteran Population by Period of Service, by County—Continued

State or County Name	Total	August 1990 or later (including Persian Gulf War)			No Vietnam Era Service	
		Served In Vietnam Era	No Vietnam Era service	Total serving August 1990 or later	Served September 1980 or later only	Served prior to September 1980
Summit County	1,686	30	267	297	256	11
Teller County	3,014	102	372	474	319	53
Washington County	561	3	24	27	22	2
Weld County	15,156	175	1,564	1,739	1,428	136
Yuma County	889	7	66	73	56	10

Census 1990 vs. 2000 Veteran Population in the U.S. and Puerto Rico

State	1990 Veterans	2000 Veterans	+Gain/ –Loss	Percent change between 1990–2000
Alabama	434,787	447,397	12,610	2.9%
Alaska	68,252	71,552	3,300	4.8%
Arizona	464,023	562,916	98,893	21.3%
Arkansas	265,055	281,714	16,659	6.3%
California	3,001,905	2,569,340	–432,565	–14.4%
Colorado	409,932	446,385	36,453	8.9%
Connecticut	373,933	310,069	–63,864	–17.1%
Delaware	80,909	84,289	3,380	4.2%
District of Columbia	57,874	44,484	–13,390	–23.1%
Florida	1,719,129	1,875,597	156,468	9.1%
Georgia	693,225	768,675	75,450	10.9%
Hawaii	119,256	120,587	1,331	1.1%
Idaho	116,609	136,584	19,975	17.1%
Illinois	1,162,158	1,003,572	–158,586	–13.6%
Indiana	623,098	590,476	–32,622	–5.2%
Iowa	310,122	292,020	–18,102	–5.8%
Kansas	280,806	267,452	–13,354	–4.8%
Kentucky	380,610	380,618	8	0.0%
Louisiana	404,186	392,486	–11,700	–2.9%
Maine	159,333	154,590	–4,743	–3.0%
Maryland	558,613	524,230	–34,383	–6.2%
Massachusetts	656,850	558,933	–97,917	–14.9%
Michigan	1,005,699	913,573	–92,126	–9.2%
Minnesota	489,498	464,968	–24,530	–5.0%
Mississippi	237,977	249,431	11,454	4.8%
Missouri	613,859	592,271	–21,588	–3.5%
Montana	102,536	108,476	5,940	5.8%
Nebraska	177,852	173,189	–4,663	–2.6%
Nevada	182,084	238,128	56,044	30.8%
New Hampshire	141,617	139,038	–2,579	–1.8%
New Jersey	817,409	672,217	–145,192	–17.8%
New Mexico	178,022	190,718	12,696	7.1%
New York	1,707,476	1,361,164	–346,312	–20.3%
North Carolina	719,458	792,646	73,188	10.2%
North Dakota	64,772	61,365	–3,407	–5.3%
Ohio	1,259,535	1,144,007	–115,528	–9.2%

Census 1990 vs. 2000 Veteran Population in the U.S. and Puerto Rico—Continued

State	1990 Veterans	2000 Veterans	+Gain/ –Loss	Percent change between 1990–2000
Oklahoma	377,148	376,062	–1,086	–0.3%
Oregon	384,189	388,990	4,801	1.2%
Pennsylvania	1,450,037	1,280,788	–169,249	–11.7%
Puerto Rico	138,150	146,001	7,851	5.7%
Rhode Island	118,330	102,494	–15,836	–13.4%
South Carolina	381,691	420,971	39,280	10.3%
South Dakota	76,923	79,370	2,447	3.2%
Tennessee	531,723	560,141	28,418	5.3%
Texas	1,726,617	1,754,809	28,192	1.6%
Utah	146,630	161,351	14,721	10.0%
Vermont	64,814	62,809	–2,005	–3.1%
Virginia	733,092	786,359	53,267	7.3%
Washington	653,068	670,628	17,560	2.7%
West Virginia	210,941	201,701	–9,240	–4.4%
Wisconsin	532,936	514,213	–18,723	–3.5%
Wyoming	54,457	57,860	3,403	6.2%
Total U.S. & P.R.	**27,619,205**	**26,549,704**	**–1,069,501**	**–3.9%**

Source: Census 2000, as of 4/1/2000

Appendix B
Fact Sheet: How a VA National Cemetery is Created, Public and Intergovernmental Affairs, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

April 2005

"How A VA National Cemetery Is Created"

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) creates a new national cemetery through a six-step process. Each step requires that congressionally approved funds are available. The steps are: site selection, environmental assessment, land acquisition, master planning and design development, preparation of construction documents and construction. The development, eventual operation and maintenance of the cemetery are the responsibility of VA's National Cemetery Administration.

Site Selection

VA identifies a geographic area with a large veteran population unserved by a national or state veterans cemetery. The cemetery's size and number of gravesites will be determined by demographic forecasts. VA canvases the area for sites of the size needed and evaluates their suitability for cemetery development.

Criteria for site selection include: accessibility, available utilities and water, surrounding land use, soil, topography and shape, aesthetic appearance and restrictions to development, including factors such as the presence of endangered species, mineral rights or easements. Good roads should be nearby and provide minimal travel time from population hubs. Adequate water for irrigation is important. Adjacent areas should not be noisy or unsightly. Level to rolling terrain is best, but some slope is desirable to permit drainage.

Two to five sites are identified and advance to the next step in the process.

Environmental Assessment

To comply with the National Environmental Policy Act, the top sites are assessed to determine the impact of a cemetery on the environment. An environmental assessment document is prepared, identifying VA's preferred site. The assessment must result in a "finding of no significant impact" for the site to be considered. After receiving a positive finding, VA makes the results available to the public for a 30-day comment period. After that, VA officials make a final recommendation to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, who decides whether to acquire the property.

Land Acquisition

In some instances, land is donated to VA. In other cases, federal and state agencies transfer property to VA at no cost. Otherwise, land is purchased at the fair market value established by a real-property appraisal. Before the final sales contract is signed, the Department of Justice, acting on VA's behalf, reviews all documents to ensure that the contract and title meet all requirements for a legal transfer of ownership.

Master Planning and Design Development

Once VA takes title to the land, it solicits bids from architectural and engineering (A/E) firms and contracts with one to design the new cemetery. The A/E firm prepares a master plan for developing all phases of the cemetery, and follows with a more detailed design for the first phase of construction. The first phase usually includes the first active burial section and the required infrastructure to operate the cemetery. Later phases generally include new burial sections and associated infrastructure. Typically, each phase of construction is designed to provide burial space for 10 years.

Construction Document Preparation

Under a second negotiated contract, the A/E firm prepares plans and specifications that detail all aspects of phase-one construction: active burial sections, administrative and maintenance buildings, public information center, committal shelters, roads and other infrastructure. These documents provide the basis for contractors to bid on constructing the project.

Construction Award and Completion

Finally, VA solicits bids and awards a contract for construction of the new cemetery. The process takes about four months; actual construction of phase one takes about 24 months.

Land purchases and construction require multiple congressional appropriations, over several years' budgets, to complete each phase. In total, site selection, environmental assessment, master planning, design and phase-one construction require about five years to complete.

One of VA's goals is to provide veterans reasonable access to burial options. VA considers reasonable access to mean that a veteran or spouse can have a casketed or cremation burial in a national or state veterans cemetery within 75 miles of home. Experience and recent data show that more than 80 percent of persons interred in national cemeteries lived within 75 miles of the cemetery when they died.

To achieve that goal, VA builds new national cemeteries where veterans do not already have access. VA also manages the State Cemetery Grants Program, which encourages states to build veterans cemeteries in unserved areas. The number of veterans within 75 miles of a national or state veterans cemetery with available burial space has increased from 65 percent in 1995 to 83 percent today. In 2009, 89 percent of veterans will have that access.

VA has built six new national cemeteries since 1997 and is currently constructing five new ones. It is also increasing the long-term burial capacity of existing national cemeteries by acquiring adjacent land, building columbaria for cremated remains where feasible, and using designs that maximize the space available.

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs
Washington, DC.
July 11, 2008

The Honorable John T. Salazar
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Salazar:

At the Subcommittee's May 2, 2008, field hearing on the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Cemetery Construction Policy, you asked whether VA has the authority to accept, as a gift, funds for the construction of a national cemetery. At the hearing, I indicated that it would be necessary for me to consult with Counsel in order to provide an answer to your question.

VA General Counsel has advised me that the Secretary has authority to accept funds designated for the construction of a national cemetery. Such authority is set forth in 38 U.S.C., section 8301, which permits the Secretary to "accept, for use in carrying out all laws administered by the Secretary, gifts, devises, and bequests which will enhance the Secretary's ability to provide services or benefits."

A copy of the document by which the General Counsel sets forth this opinion is enclosed.

A similar letter has been sent to Chairman John J. Hall and Ranking Republican Member Doug L. Lamborn.

Sincerely,

William F. Tuerk

Enclosure

Authority to Accept Gifts of Land or Monetary Donations for the Construction of a National Cemetery

The Secretary is authorized to accept gifts of lands for national cemeteries, and gift devises, or bequests made for the beautification or benefit of the national cemeteries. 38 U.S.C. §§ 2406, 240. Relative to this gift acceptance authority, the Secretary has delegated to the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs certain gift acceptance authority for donations made, in any manner, to the National Cemetery Administration for the beautification or benefit of national cemeteries, except offers of land. 38 CFR § 2.6(f)(3). The Secretary has retained authority to accept offers of land. The Secretary's authority for acceptance of an offer of land may be delegated in writing to another official pursuant to VA Directive 0000, but there is no such delegation currently in force.

Other than 38 U.S.C. § 8103(a)(1) and (2), which authorized the Secretary to accept gifts of land for the construction of a medical facility, or acquisition of a facility (including the site of such facility) for use as a VA medical facility, we are aware of no other statutory provision that expressly authorizes the Secretary to accept land donations. The remaining gift acceptance authorities contained in title 38 authorize the acceptance of gifts: for recreational activities furthering rehabilitation of disabled veterans (38 U.S.C. § 521(b)); of merchandise, fixtures, equipment, and supplies for the use and benefit of the Veterans' Canteen Service (38 U.S.C. § 7802(h)); for the construction, acquisition, and operation of medical facilities (38 U.S.C. § 8104(e)); and for the use and benefit of veteran patients or members of hospitals or homes, the hospitals or homes themselves, or for use in carrying out all VA laws (38 U.S.C. § 8301).

The Secretary has authority to accept funds designated for the construction of a national cemetery. Section 8301 of title 38 permits the Secretary to "accept, for use in carrying out all laws administered by the Secretary, gifts, devises, and bequests which will enhance the Secretary's ability to provide services or benefits." By memorandum dated September 10, 2005, the Secretary delegated this gift acceptance authority under section 8301 (second sentence) to Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and other key officials, to include the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs (USMA). Subject to this delegation, the USMA may accept donations made expressly for the construction of a national cemetery. Pursuant to internal VA principles governing the acceptance of gifts authorized under the last sentence of 38 U.S.C. § 8301, as approved by the Secretary on September 10, 2005, funds accepted with a commitment to use them as the donor specifies will be administered in fulfillment

of the donor's specified wishes. Pursuant to 38 U.S.C. § 8302, monetary funds are administered through the General Post Fund in accordance with its rules of accounting and disbursement.

Office of the General Counsel
Amanda R. Blackmon
(202) 461–7665
June 5, 2008

○