

**ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY:
AN UPDATE FROM THE NEW ADMINISTRATION**

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DISABILITY ASSISTANCE AND
MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
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COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
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**ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY:
AN UPDATE FROM THE NEW ADMINISTRATION**

THURSDAY, JUNE 23, 2011

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 2:31 p.m., in Room 334, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. Jon Runyan [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Runyan, Stutzman, McNerney, and Walz.

Also Present: Representative Johnson.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN RUNYAN

Mr. RUNYAN. Good afternoon and welcome. This oversight hearing of the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs will now come to order. We are here today to monitor the progress of the new administration at Arlington National Cemetery (ANC), after taking over following the shocking revelations of last year's Army's Inspector General (OIG) report.

Before we get started, I would first like to recognize Mr. Richard Hopkins, who is sitting over there on the first row. Mr. Hopkins is a constituent of mine and traveled down from Marlton, New Jersey, to be here with us today. This hearing is of great interest to Mr. Hopkins because he has both of his parents, and his lovely sister is sitting next to him, both of his parents are buried at Arlington. He was understandably upset, as was I, when I first took on this Chairmanship. Mr. Hopkins called me and said he had a couple of questions with something going on in Arlington. His father's gravestone had been replaced with another man's name. But working with Ms. Condon and her newly-appointed team, Mr. Hopkins' problem was solved and the headstone was fixed in a matter of days.

I had the privilege of paying my respects to his parents and seeing the new headstone and the correct names were in place. However, I believe this story highlights some of the heartache associated with the recent problems at Arlington. We all know that 1 year at the helm of Arlington Cemetery is not long enough to fix all the problems. Years, if not decades of neglect and mismanagement cannot be fixed overnight. However, with the experience the new leadership brings, great strides have been made.

The troubles at Arlington existed on all levels, from highly publicized problems with gravesite locations, low employee morale and an information technology (IT) system that was virtually non-existent, despite several years of development and millions of taxpayer dollars.

There have already been multiple hearings of other Committees on the past performance issues at Arlington. I want to be clear: It is not my intention to rehash these issues and dwell on the past. My focus for this hearing will be on what Ms. Condon and Mr. Hallinan and the rest of the staff at Arlington National Cemetery have accomplished thus far since taking over the operations of the Cemetery, as well as how they plan to ensure these type of issues never occur again.

I believe one place to start is the training of employees. As we all know, practice makes perfect. And I can tell you from personal experience, it is perfect practice that makes perfect. It is perfection that our veterans and their families deserve.

I hope to hear an update from Ms. Condon about Arlington's efforts to provide continuing training to their employees, training of substance that will help prevent the Cemetery from repeating its past mistakes and keep employees accountable, knowing what the standard is and keeping it.

I was encouraged by what I saw in my visit to Arlington National Cemetery earlier this spring. Every indication that I have received shows there is a new attitude of performance and accountability at Arlington. Ms. Condon and her team have already put into action many changes that were needed and long overdue. While much has been accomplished in the last 12 months, there is still much more hard work ahead.

One matter of major importance has come to the Subcommittee's attention. This discovery on June 10th, 2011, of 69 boxes of records and documents from Arlington National Cemetery in an abandoned unit of public storage facility in Northern Virginia. The Army's Criminal Investigation Division (CID) was called in and a criminal investigation is ongoing on this matter. I commend Ms. Condon and her staff for quickly informing the House and Senate Committees with oversight of Arlington when this investigation commenced. It is the Committee's desire to fully support this investigation. And I eagerly await the findings and the results.

However, I am less pleased with the lack of follow-up and public disclosure by Arlington after the initial notification. Two weeks have passed with little follow up and no public disclosure of the incident or the investigation. We know little more about the incident now than was first reported to the Committee staff in the late afternoon of June 10th. It is my understanding that these were copies of grave cards and other documents provided to a contractor for producing a digital database for the Cemetery. Who this contractor was, how the documents wound up in a public storage facility, how long they had been there, who had access to the documents, what had become of the digital database project this contractor was working on and how much the contractor was paid? All of these questions have been yet to be answered, even though the investigations are directly from Arlington's own records.

Of acute concern to me is the vulnerability of the personal information on these cards while they were outside the control of Arlington. Arlington's duty to our fallen heroes is not just in providing an environment of respect and dignity for final resting places, but also in protecting privacy, even after death.

I welcome and look forward to Ms. Condon's remarks and hope she will offer some greater transparency and clarity to this situation, not only for the Committee, but for the families and the American people who hold Arlington in the highest esteem. It is for this reason that I pledge the support of the Committee to ensure all of last year's discrepancies cited by the OIG are corrected and that this dark chapter in the Cemetery's history is closed for good.

I further offer the Committee's support to the Department of the Army, the families of those buried at Arlington, the veterans service organizations (VSOs), and all interested Americans who work together to ensure a much brighter future for Arlington National Cemetery and to help it once again become the iconic symbol of eternal respect of our Nation and all those who have served their country.

I will now call on the Ranking Member, Mr. Walz, for his opening statements.

[The prepared statement of Chairman Runyan appears on p. 34.]

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. TIMOTHY J. WALZ

Mr. WALZ. Well, I want to thank the Chairman, his staff and the minority staff for putting together this important fact-finding hearing, and quite honestly, for fulfilling our Constitutional oversight responsibility. I very much appreciate that. Ranking Member McNerney will be joining us shortly. And also, to Mr. Hopkins and your family, I express the deepest apology for something that is absolutely inexcusable. And I would also like to thank you and Mr. Runyan for your taking the time to travel here with the purpose of making sure this doesn't happen to another family, that is very much appreciated. So thank you for that.

Arlington Cemetery, as the Chairman has so eloquently said, is an unparalleled national treasure, and it serves a very, very unique mission. From humble beginnings as a Potter's Field in 1864, Arlington has become the sacred burial site for many of America's most honored veterans, other dignitaries, including U.S. Presidents, Supreme Court Justices, and those who died in September 11th, 2001. Arlington truly has become a national shrine and the most hallowed of ground.

Each year, Arlington welcomes millions of visitors from both home and abroad and conducts thousands of burials of the highest honor. However, as we are hearing, we have recently seen the shortcomings at Arlington Cemetery. The archaic recordkeeping—it is simply unimaginable that we are still doing business the way that we were until this new team, this dedicated team came on board. We were still doing it the same way that we were basically since the Civil War, and now moved somewhat forward.

The contracting—we have oversight responsibility of that. We need to make sure that they can actually deliver and make sure we are providing that oversight of those contractors to make sure fraud, waste and abuse doesn't occur. And of course, the March

2011 *Time Magazine* article talking about what happened to Mr. Hopkins simply is the unthinkable in this circumstance, and I am certainly glad we are addressing them.

The good news, I think, is that we are moving in the right direction. The good news is that these are problems that can be solved and will be solved, that is simply our mission and nothing less. Avoidable, yes, but we are committed to getting it right for all of the moral reasons, but we need to use our resources wisely. We have too much business to conduct and Arlington needs to be there for eternity, and that is exactly the way we are going to take it.

I look forward to finding out more about the length of burial delays that I am hearing from some of my constituents and some of the survivors. And I think the Chairman's concern is absolutely founded, and I concur with him on the recently recovered 69 boxes of material. On multiple levels, this poses a real problem and I want to see if we can move forward, as the Chairman said. We are going to hear from a second panel after we hear from these two dedicated servants. We are going to hear from a panel that is going to tell us what we can do better and we need to take that very seriously.

So Ms. Condon, Mr. Hallinan, thank you for the work you are doing and thank you for the service you are doing. You have approached your work with the passion and with the respect and the professionalism that we were hoping would happen. I am very interested to see what is going to come in the future. I want to see how you respond a little bit today to some of these things, and then we are looking for, I believe, September of this year we have another status report due.

So our veterans and their loved ones deserve nothing less than a place of rest with surety and dignity, that is our job to make sure it happens. With that, Mr. Chairman, I thank you for your leadership and I yield back.

[The prepared statement of Congressman McNerney appears on p. 35.]

Mr. RUNYAN. With that being said, I ask unanimous consent that all Members be allowed to sit at the dais and ask questions. Hearing no objection, so ordered. At this time I would like to welcome our first panel of witnesses, Ms. Kathryn A. Condon, Executive Director of the Nation Cemeteries Program for the Department of the Army. And also Mr. Patrick Hallinan, Superintendent of Arlington National Cemetery.

Ms. Condon, your complete written statement will be entered into the hearing record and I will now recognize you for 5 minutes for your statement.

STATEMENTS OF KATHRYN A. CONDON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ARMY NATIONAL CEMETERIES PROGRAM, DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE; AND PATRICK K. HALLINAN, SUPERINTENDANT, ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY, DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

STATEMENT OF KATHRYN A. CONDON

Ms. CONDON. Thank you, Chairman Runyan, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. If I could take a moment right now to set the record straight. I did not throw myself down the stairs a month ago to avoid the previously scheduled hearing, trust me, the hearing would have been much less painful than what I did to my ankle.

I want to thank you for holding this hearing today to allow Mr. Hallinan and I to talk about what we have accomplished in the past year at Arlington National Cemetery. Over the past year, we have implemented management changes to improve the organization, and to increase the quality and efficiency in the areas of daily operations, customer service, records management and most importantly, fiscal responsibility.

As I stated in my written statement, which I would like to submit for the record, thank you, sir, I am confident that you will see that progress has been made in reestablishing the Nation's confidence in Arlington National Cemetery. Management functions have been consolidated within the Army National Cemeteries program. The staff under my direction as Executive Director have functional expertise in strategic management and communications, in information management, in resource management and in engineering.

I am supported by ceremonial units from all of the armed services, a detailed staff of chaplains, staff support from headquarters Department of the Army, and the Arlington Ladies, who represent the chiefs and commandants of each Armed Service at each funeral. The result is now that we have clearly defined roles, responsibilities and relationships at Arlington.

My staff performs both an enabling function and oversight role for the Superintendent's execution of daily operations. The intent is to enhance operations by removing administrative burdens from those responsible for execution. While having the administrative functions performed by subject matter experts, and clearly segregating duties to ensure proper accountability and oversight.

We have focused the execution elements of the workforce by establishing leadership positions where none existed before. There are now team leader positions and job assignments to better manage and execute daily operations. Mr. Hallinan will speak to the improvements that we have made to the daily operation of the Cemetery.

Customer service is the most critical priority for us at Arlington, to be responsive to each and every caller and to establish a uniform standard for scheduling, we streamline public interaction and telephonic communications by transitioning to a call center. We now document and track all incoming calls to the center, which has handled 31,671 calls since December. We receive on an average of

232 calls a day in Arlington. And of those each day, 45 is the average for those who want to schedule an interment.

We have transitioned to a full digital interment scheduling organization now that has a searchable database that provides both the digital tool and, more importantly, a backup for the authoritative records.

We have completely changed fiscal and procurement operations from fund certification and approvals to recompeting, consolidating and rewarding all of the service contracts that Mr. Hallinan and I inherited on 1 June of last year. We reduced the number of contracts from Arlington from 28 to 16, and each and every one of those was awarded to a small business.

To ensure accountability for the past, I have asked that the Army Audit Agency come back in, because at the end of this fiscal year, we want to make sure that the changes that Mr. Hallinan and I have both implemented are truly working and sufficient. So we want to make sure that an outside agency looks at us so we have that as well.

Finally, we are revising our long-term master plan. In the 10-year capital investment plan for the Cemetery, which includes the plan expansions for the 31 acres known as the millennium project. The 42 acres for the Base Realignment and Closure of the Navy annex, and the construction of Columbarium Court 9, which we will start construction this fiscal year, so I would like to thank the Committee for helping us with that. And we are also doing a comprehensive assessment of the current status of all of facilities and infrastructure at the Cemetery.

We are committed to maintaining Arlington's grounds and infrastructure in accordance to the standards that each and every one of us expect of the national shine, while also maintaining the cemetery's viability as an active cemetery for those who have served our Nation.

I hope the highlights of the actions taken and the changes implemented demonstrate the progress that has been and continues to be made to restore the Nation's confidence in Arlington National Cemetery.

I would like to thank the Subcommittee for taking a positive leadership role in the oversight of Arlington and coming to visit us at Arlington to see the changes that we have made. Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony, and I look forward to taking questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Condon appears on p. 35.]

Mr. RUNYAN. Thank you, Ms. Condon. Mr. Hallinan, do you have an opening statement? You will be recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF PATRICK K. HALLINAN

Mr. HALLINAN. Mr. Chairman, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak about the progress at Arlington National Cemetery. One year ago this month, Ms. Condon and I, at the direction of the Secretary of the Army, set out to correct the problems identified in the Army OIG's report. I am pleased to report to you that 1 year later, we have arrived at a point where significant progress has been made at Arlington

National Cemetery, and we continue on the path towards addressing and correcting all of the issues identified in the report.

Much has been done, much remains to be done in the future. The progress that we have made to date is like permanent and lasting cultural and procedural changes through the way we carry out our mission. In the last year, we have greatly strengthened our interment procedures. One of the first things we did to prevent future burial errors was to implement new procedures for the chain of custody to maintain positive identification of casketed or cremated remains from the time they arrive at the Cemetery, until they are secured in their final resting place.

In addition, Arlington now uses concrete urn liners, similar to grave liners used for caskets, which eliminates the risk of urns being unintentionally removed or disassociated from their final resting place. Arlington is the first and only national cemetery using urn liners.

In terms of rebuilding the workforce, leadership has implemented industry standard procedures, training and equipment that equal the best national cemeteries. In addition, the new Deputy Superintendent, Mr. James Gemmell, and I are out daily among the workforce providing direction and guidance while holding supervisors, team leaders and the workforce accountable for operations.

The Army has an agreement with the Department of Veterans Affairs that allows Arlington employees to enroll in the National Cemetery Administration's Training Center. We also provide internal and additional external training to the workforce. New authorized positions and employee turnover have afforded us the opportunity to bring in trained, seasoned professionals. Arlington National Cemetery has filled critical positions such as the Deputy Superintendent, Cemetery and customer service representatives.

Arlington National Cemetery has begun operating 6 days a week to improve customer service and gain operational efficiencies. In order to meet the demand for funeral services, Arlington has started scheduling services on a Saturday. For the first time in the Cemetery's history, Saturday services are performed for dependent and veterans who do not require military honors. The steps we have taken in the past year have put us on the path to maintaining Arlington's position as America's premiere military cemetery and the sacred treasure it is in American history.

This concludes my opening statement, Mr. Chairman, and I would be happy to answer any questions of the Subcommittee.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hallinan appears on p. 39.]

Mr. RUNYAN. Thank you very much, Mr. Hallinan. I will begin the questioning and recognize the Ranking Member and other Members in alternating order of arrival.

Ms. CONDON, I think there is a little tension in the air over our newfound issue there at Arlington. I know there is an ongoing criminal investigation there. I don't know what you are able to tell us, but please fill us in as much as possible.

Ms. CONDON. The records are part of an ongoing criminal investigation, and it was related to a previous contract to digitize Arlington's paper records. On the 9th of June through our newly implemented call center, we received a telephone call from the storage facility owner. Immediately upon receipt of that call, we called

Army CID to go and see what was at the storage facility. Army CID did, at that time, secure the 69 boxes of records. When they brought the 69 boxes of records, which were just scans of the previous digitized effort that was part of that contract, we immediately called in the Department of the Army's information assurance organization to make sure that there wasn't any personal identifying information challenges there. The recommendation, when we looked at the scanned records, was that the issue there was rated low, because my immediate concern, as Mr. Hallinan's was, that there could possibly have been identifying information in those boxes and we would have immediately at that initial time contacted everyone. But the information assurance people said the threat was low because there were just scanned copies of a previous contract that we had to digital records.

The other information, sir, that you asked about who was the contract, how much was the contract, that with is all part of the ongoing investigation. And as soon as we get the results of that, we will share it with the Committee.

Mr. RUNYAN. Thank you very much. I am sure it is part of your stressful situation of digging out of someone else's hole. I give you credit for that. We know it is not where we want to be. But it is a necessary job that we all have to do to really get Arlington back on the pedestal that it needs to be on. And I applaud both of you for that, but I would appreciate and hope that you report back to this Committee when you find any information, because quite frankly, it is about people who gave their lives for our country and sacrificed a lot for us to have these freedoms, to have arguments like this all the time.

I say I look forward to it, but I see another round of hearings like this one that are going to be ongoing as we go through this process.

I know when I was out there visiting this spring, I believe you had two gentlemen there that were active duty that were basically your IT guys. I know they were going to be reassigned at some point. Have you been able to fill those positions with qualified people and pick up where they left off?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, fortunately, the uniformed individuals that are part of our IT staff are still with us, and I am going to replace them with other uniformed IT guys. But the good news is that we have been able to hire the complement of our IT staff with very, very dedicated, experienced professionals in everything from GIS to records management to information assurance. So we have built the civilian and military team in IT.

Mr. RUNYAN. Okay. Thank you.

I know the next panel will have a lot on this, but when we have the VSOs we always talk about stakeholders. Have you instituted a more formalized customer service survey, to really get the feedback and help you in your process, because I know we all have a great idea when we started, but it is ultimately the customer that helps us polish it?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, as a matter of fact, we have our new IT staff on our Web site we have a place where anyone can comment on their experiences at Arlington National Cemetery, which is our first way of reaching out to the customer. Also, our public affairs

staff is currently working on an outreach program to our VSOs, et cetera, so that we can get the stakeholder feedback as well. We are also planning to revise our Web site so that we can have better information flow to the American public. And we are working on a survey that we give to each and every family member after their service so that they can provide us the necessary feedback that Mr. Hallinan and I need for continued process improvement at the Cemetery.

Mr. RUNYAN. Okay. Mr. Hallinan, you commented on Mr. Gemmell's hiring. Can you kind of discuss some of the complications and challenges. You have been in the industry a long time of finding qualified individuals, which obviously lacked in the last management team.

Mr. HALLINAN. Mr. Chairman, we face the same difficulties any Federal agency would face in trying to bring new people on, but one thing is unique about Arlington in its mission is we have literally had hundreds of people applying for various positions. So the caliber of people we are going to get to choose from is among the finest in the Nation and specifically in regards to Mr. Gemmell, with his many years of cemetery experience, being the Cemetery director. Also, Mr. Gemmell was the director of the National Training Center. So to reinforce your statement, your opening statement, sir, this year will be about train, train and training the employees. Set a high standard, train to that standard, then hold people accountable to that standard. That was the intent of bringing him and others on. We have been successful.

Mr. RUNYAN. It sounds like you are stealing everybody away, though.

Mr. HALLINAN. Only the good ones.

Mr. RUNYAN. One last question for Ms. Condon. You were talking about the transition and the Internet scheduling system. Has it been seamless and smooth, and do you have everyone trained up and able to have it working in that optimal range?

Ms. CONDON. You know, sir, I am not going to say it was completely seamless without its challenges, because, as you know, a year ago they were literally using paper records and a Selectric typewriter. I am very proud to say that we have now completely transitioned to a digital scheduling system. We have gone paperless, and the workforce are all using the system. It was what you have emphasized, it is training, training and training. And, you know, so I am proud to say today that we have gone digital in our scheduling system.

Mr. RUNYAN. Thank you very much. With that, I will recognize the Ranking Member, Mr. Walz.

Mr. WALZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and again, thank you both for the work you are doing.

It is very difficult, I appreciate you taking this on. I am just even reading how we write about these things talking about how to identify the misplaced urns. You misplace your keys, you do not misplace the remains of a hero. I am trying to figure out have all the families involved in this been notified? If there has been heroes or loved ones misplaced or misidentified? Is there anybody in America where their family members are interred at Arlington and got mis-

placed as the team that came up there indicated, or have they all been notified?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, the family members for which you are talking about when we did discover the eight urns that were identified in that one gravesite. The family members of the individuals that we have been able to identify the remains of their loved ones have all been notified. They were notified immediately upon receipt that it was actually their loved one, because we had the forensic lab from Hawaii who did that for us.

We are still waiting for the closeout of that investigation, because they were trying to see if they could look into every possible lead to identify the other urns that we have not identified.

Mr. WALZ. What is changed in your best practices and chain of command to make sure that this never happened again? If I asked you, Mr. Hallinan, to turn around and tell anyone who is in this room or listening, how do we assure this won't happen again?

Mr. HALLINAN. Well, sir, I would say standards and procedures are being put in place along with supervision and monitoring and accountability. When it comes specifically to disassociation of urns and how could that happen, we have had backhoe operators go and excavate a gravesite with very little information. One of the standards that is in place right now that gives me full confidence that people are being interred correctly, and these urns and gravesites are being protected, that individual has a complete readout of that gravesite that he's about to open; what is in that gravesite? What depth? What type of container? Is it a cremation? Where is the cremation located? We probe for cremation before we go into a gravesite.

Mr. WALZ. For every single site at Arlington now?

Mr. HALLINAN. Yes, sir. But additionally, one point I would like to make because it is extremely important both for the Subcommittee and for the American people, when I mention the use of concrete urn liners, that is going to prevent and eliminate disassociation of remains so we do not face that again. Those urns are being protected, they are secured. And the probability of them being dug up and disassociated from the gravesite has been eliminated with that practice, so that is a very important standard that is in place right now.

Mr. WALZ. What type of services do we contract for? What are the private sector contractors, what type of jobs are they being asked to do at Arlington?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, most of our service contracts are in the area of the lawn in agriculture, our tree maintenance, our mowing, et cetera. And then we have some of our operational services that fall under Mr. Hallinan that are also contracted. If you want to expound on those, Pat.

Mr. WALZ. Do contractors handle remains in the chain of command?

Mr. HALLINAN. Absolutely not, sir. Of the contracts that are in place from an operational sense of ground maintenance, are mowing, trimming, headstone washing and headstone raising and re-aligning. There were issues in the past that this Subcommittee is aware of with contracting, but under Ms. Condon's direction and support, every contract of the 16 that are in place right now have

certified contracting officers monitoring those contractors. The contractors also have my oversight where I am out in the sections and I am monitoring the mowing, the trimming, are they setting those headstones correctly, are they aligned horizontally and vertically, are they set to a new standard of 23 to 26 inches? So there is full oversight and accountability for the contractors.

Mr. WALZ. How many employees do we have, government employees at Arlington?

Ms. CONDON. Go ahead.

Mr. HALLINAN. Approximately 124, sir.

Mr. WALZ. Is that correct number that we need to make sure that this is carried out efficiently, effectively, with dignity and with accuracy?

Mr. HALLINAN. Congress has authorized additional employees, we are in the process of bringing that staff on. We are looking for the best that we can find in the industry. I think what has been authorized will be enough to accomplish the job.

Ms. CONDON. And sir, if I may, one of the things that Secretary McHugh directed when Pat and I started was a complete manpower survey review from the Army.

Mr. WALZ. And that is happening?

Ms. CONDON. And that has already been happening, it has already been completed. And the number they came up with was 157 employees is truly the number that you need to do the mission correctly and we are hiring to that number.

Mr. WALZ. I will end with one if we come back around again. Has this Congress, this Committee or any regulations put any unfunded mandates on you that can be perceived as pulling away from your core mission?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, not—you know, not to date that I have. I mean this Committee has been nothing but helpful in helping Mr. Hallinan and I move forward to make the changes that we do need in Arlington.

Mr. WALZ. Very good, thank you both again. I yield back.

Mr. RUNYAN. Thank you, Mr. Walz. Mr. Stutzman.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Mr. Chairman, I think Mr. Johnson was here before myself.

Mr. RUNYAN. I will gladly go, but seeing how you are a Member of this Subcommittee, we will allow you to go first, he is a guest.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Oh, is that right? Thank you. I would always be glad to defer to my good friend anyway.

Mr. RUNYAN. I am sure you will both yield each other your time.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you for being here today. I guess I would like to touch on the boxes just a little bit and have several questions on that. Whose doing the investigation?

Ms. CONDON. The Army Criminal Investigation Division command, sir.

Mr. STUTZMAN. And do you know have there been any other boxes—you don't have any record that these boxes were stored off site; is that correct?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, the first time that we knew that the records were stored off site was when we received the phone call to the Cemetery from the current owner of the storage facility.

Mr. STUTZMAN. So that is not typical practice then?

Ms. CONDON. That is not—I can't tell you what the practice was prior to Mr. Hallinan and I being there, but, sir, anything that Mr. Hallinan and I would do with records, we would make sure that the records were secured and accounted for.

Mr. STUTZMAN. I know we will probably find out a lot more information once the investigation is done. So as far as you are aware, there are no other boxes that are stored anywhere outside of your facilities that you know of?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, to date, I do not know of any other, but, you know, every day Mr. Hallinan and I are discovering things that we wouldn't have expected to discover yesterday.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Do you happen to know how many members' records were stored in those boxes yet? Is that something they will be notified that their records were off site and they need to be aware of that?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, as I stated when I was answering the Chairman's questions, we had an assessment from our information assurance agency to review if there was there the potential for a personal identifying information to have been compromised. The bottom line is we are going to go through each and every one of those records, but they were copies of records from every scanned record from the past. So the bottom line is a lot of the individuals on those records, their next of kin would no longer be with us to notify.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Okay, all right. Can you address the lack of the standard operating procedures (SOPs) and practices before you arrived at ANC? And what steps have you taken to address these issues, Mr. Hallinan?

Mr. HALLINAN. Based on the OIG's report and my short time on the ground when I first arrived, it was clearly evident that there were no standard operating procedures, written operating procedures in place. The training would be anecdotal. You would learn from the person next to you who would show you manually how to accomplish a task and that would vary from individual to individual. I was surprised by that. The steps we have taken immediately was to stabilize Arlington National Cemetery, which was to get out with the workforce, and show them the proper procedures, push them and pull them, if you will, through the correct steps so that they can learn and implement right away.

Basically I have used the analogy of an aircraft carrier at sea, taking it in, and option to take it in and drydock it and overhaul it. It was not an option so we had to train and operate simultaneously. We have done so and we have put written standard operate—we have a long way to go. We put this in the beginning stage, we put standard procedures in place, we are putting policies in place.

So this will give us a way forward for the future long after Ms. Condon and I are gone, Arlington will have a positive future going forward. These things will be in writing, they can be refined from time to time, as technologies change, as processes change, the employees will have ownership of the work, but at the most fundamental level we started that process, yes.

Mr. STUTZMAN. And I know it is very difficult with the Cemetery being open to the public. Can you describe the security situation

with respect to Arlington and protecting the Cemetery while still keeping it open to the public?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, if I could address that, please, one of the major concerns that I had upon taking over the executive directorship was how porous the Arlington Cemetery was because it truly is an open site. We had a study conducted for force protection and security in July of last year. As a result of that study, we have awarded a contract to make sure that we have an up-to-date surveillance system for the Cemetery.

We are creating an operations center and communication so we can have mass notification for not only our workforce, but for also our visitors and our families who enter the Cemetery. We are working on those security measures as we speak.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Good, thank you very much, I yield back.

Mr. RUNYAN. Thank you, Mr. Stutzman. Mr. McNerney, are you ready?

Mr. MCNERNEY. Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First, I want to thank Mr. Walz for stepping in. Mr. Walz is a tireless advocate for veterans and I appreciate your hard work.

Ms. Condon, I want to thank you for coming here today, and I think you have changed the tone there at Arlington, you and Mr. Hallinan together. There was some unfavorable reports in the last few years and I think you have really made a difference to turn that around. I realize it is a big undertaking, I mean, there are hundreds of thousands of our heroes that are interred there and creating a filing system that can be accessed is not an easy task. So what I would like to know is what is your assessment of where we are in that process? I mean, I can't imagine how big of a job it is, so hopefully, the question hasn't been asked too many times already.

Ms. CONDON. No, sir, you are the first one to ask that question. Just so you know, we have established an accountability task force at the Cemetery. It is a total Army effort. It has soldiers from the old guard, Department of the Army civilians, and military who are detailed to us to work on the accountability as well as our summer interns, and we are hiring some temporary employees.

The bottom line is we are currently looking at a resolution of all the gravesites and records. We are imaging the entire cemetery using geospatial information. And we will have a full accounting of not only each and every gravesite, but it will be matched and delegated against each and every record. We have started that process. We are taking a photo of each and every headstone front and back. We are going to have that on a Smartphone application where it will tie to the data. We have started that process and will be reporting out to Congress in December for that. We are well on our way, and I am very pleased with the progress to date.

Mr. MCNERNEY. I can tell by your voice and your mannerisms how excited you are about this, so thank you for that. Some of the other cemeteries that I have been around the country are fairly accessible. You used to have a computer screen and you type in the name and it shows you how to get there. I didn't see photographs of gravestones—that is a whole another level, so thank you for that work.

Mr. Hallinan, is there something you would like to recommend to this Committee in terms of how we could help you serve better in terms of what your objectives are?

Mr. HALLINAN. Sir, this Subcommittee has been supportive, and without offering a specific, I think when we look at the challenges we face and issues we are dealing with, we could speak freely to the Subcommittee as we can in this forum, we would say we need support and we need patience, because we are about the people's business. We are good stewards. I am a veteran, Ms. Condon has dedicated her life to the Nation's military. You do have good stewards in place who have the passion and who are professionals, and will hold that Cemetery not only to the highest standard, but restore the faith of the people in the Cemetery.

So this Subcommittee has been supportive, but based on the challenges, we need some patience to allow us to work through. As the Chairman pointed out, 1 year on the ground, boots on the ground is early on when you look at the many years there have been problems at Arlington.

Mr. MCNERNEY. I guess either one of you could take this one. When somebody has a need or request to bury a recently deceased veteran, what kind of customer service, if that is the one word you want to use, do they run into when they try to contact the Cemetery for—

Ms. CONDON. Sir, you weren't here in my opening remarks where I said we now have implemented a case management call center at Arlington, so that every phone call if you are calling for directions or you are calling for eligibility questions, or if you are actually calling to schedule interment, we now are tracking each and every one of those phone calls in assigning that a case number and then we call back the family there.

As I stated before, our priority is customer service. We now can tell you on the average of 47 people a day call to schedule an interment, of which Mr. Hallinan, you know, conducts 27 to 30 a day. So that tells you that there are 17 more people calling in a day than we have time slots to do their burial.

One of the advantages of having a call center and tracking every phone call in every schedule is what we now know how many people are calling and that are no longer are those calls being dropped. So it is really pushing out the time that we can accommodate the burials. But to me that is not such a bad news story because people are not getting impatient that their phone call was not answered, which was what happened in the past.

Mr. MCNERNEY. Thank you my time has expired. I want to thank the Chairman for calling this hearing today, it is an important subject.

Mr. RUNYAN. Thank you, Mr. McNerney. Mr. Johnson.

Mr. JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and thanks to the rest of the Subcommittee for allowing me to participate today. And Ms. Condon, and Mr. Hallinan, thank you, folks, for being here.

You know, I am very concerned about the 69 boxes of what has been described to me as grave cards, which typically contain very sensitive information like a veteran's full name, Social Security number, and date of birth and other confidential information. I find it extremely troubling that boxes containing this kind of informa-

tion were left unsecured and only discovered allegedly, due to a lack of payment for the use of the storage facility.

I am even more disappointed, as the Chairman pointed out earlier, that we have had a lack of follow up to inquiries from this Committee, from you, Mrs. Condon, over the last couple of weeks. As a former military guy myself of 27 years and as a veteran, and as Chairman of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee, rest assured I take this breach very seriously, and I will be actively pursuing this issue. I do have a few questions.

I have heard 69 boxes, I have heard 22 boxes. What is the right number?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, the right number is 69 boxes.

Mr. JOHNSON. Okay, you mentioned earlier that what was actually contained in the boxes and deemed as not having an information security issue were scanned, copies, correct?

Ms. CONDON. Yes, they were photocopies of records, sir.

Mr. JOHNSON. Photocopies of grave cards?

Ms. CONDON. Yes, sir.

Mr. JOHNSON. Don't photocopies of grave cards have Social Security and that kind of sensitive information on them?

Ms. CONDON. The information on those are of the deceased members, sir, they do have active Social Security numbers.

Mr. JOHNSON. Yeah, so it's typical grave card information, Social Security number, date of birth, those kinds of things?

How can that deem to be not a security issue? I spent nearly 30 years in the Air Force safeguarding information myself, formerly as the chief of the Chief Information Officer (CIO) department for U.S. Special Operations Command. Social Security numbers are sensitive information. How could it have been deemed that that is not a security breach of information?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, because the individual was deceased so the Social Security number—in most of the cases, they were records from the past and the Social Security number would no longer be a valid number.

Mr. JOHNSON. Well, yeah, don't we still safeguard that information?

Ms. CONDON. We do safeguard that information.

Mr. JOHNSON. What is the security process for safeguarding paper records? You say that you have gone digital and paperless thus far, what is your typical process for safeguarding the paper copies? What do you do with those?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, the paper copies that we currently have now are on our facility of which we safeguard them by locking up the facility every evening.

Mr. JOHNSON. So they are on site?

Ms. CONDON. They are on site. But sir, as we transition to being totally digital, we are going to take all of the current paper records and put them in a secure Army storage facility.

Mr. JOHNSON. Okay. Who has jurisdiction over this investigation? I know you said who is conducting the investigation as far as you are concerned, but who has jurisdiction? Is it CID or Department of the Interior, who is it?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, our Army Criminal Investigation Division is doing that investigation. And I would have to take that for the record, if I may, if there is jurisdiction other than the Army?

[The DoD subsequently provided the following information:]

CID has investigative jurisdiction and responsibility for allegations of criminal acts related to Arlington National Cemetery.

Mr. JOHNSON. Okay. Can you provide a little bit more information about the contractor and the contract that they were completing in regards to these boxes? Are you permitted to say here who that contractor is?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, no I am not, because that is part of the ongoing investigation.

Mr. JOHNSON. Okay. Can you tell us when the contract was awarded and are they still under contract?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, I can tell you that they are no longer under contract, but the other details are part of the investigation, and I do not have that with me.

Mr. JOHNSON. Have you reviewed the contract that this contractor was working under?

Ms. CONDON. I personally have not, but it was a part of a contracting review that Secretary McHugh had directed, and it has been reviewed by the Army.

Mr. JOHNSON. Do you know if there were any conditions for the security of records specified in the contract?

Ms. CONDON. No, sir, I do not?

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. Chairman, I am out of time, but have a whole lot of questions that I guess we will have to get to in another context, but thank you for the time. I yield back.

Mr. RUNYAN. Thank you, Mr. Johnson. And I think we are going to do another round because I have some more questions so you may get to some of them.

Going down that same line of questioning, Ms. Condon, do you have any idea—has the CID given you any idea when they intend to complete the investigation?

Ms. CONDON. No, sir, they have not.

Mr. RUNYAN. Okay. And reading the testimony of the next panel, they give you very high marks on your progress thus far, but they are hesitant to the communication breakdown. How do you respond to those suggestions and what can be done to improve that situation?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, as I stated before, we are going to be reaching out to all of the VSOs and to our constituents to put Committees together and we have already conducted town halls, et cetera, so that we can share information. As I stated, customer service is our priority, we have a long way to go. We had to fix, what I said before, the foundation of Arlington first, and now we are going to take this next year and beyond to the next step where we truly, you know, make sure that we work on how we deal with our stakeholders, our family members and the loved ones who have someone buried at the Cemetery.

Mr. RUNYAN. Thank you. And Mr. Hallinan, here in the VA, and Secretary Shinseki always talks about accountability. It is the first word out of his mouth. And I think a lot of times we have a hard time implementing it. Can you give us examples of working with

your contractors in the Cemetery and how they are being held accountable to the standards your team has set up?

Mr. HALLINAN. Yes, I can. Currently, the contract I will use, the mowing contract and some of the grounds maintenance contracts, the statements of work have been rewritten to make them more stringent. The contracting representatives that have oversight have been trained and certified, they are out there daily monitoring that contractor. The contractor hits a headstone or damages the turf, we will hold that contractor accountable. We are looking for them to meet the contract and meet the high standards included in that statement of work. So as we have set the standard for our own employees, Mr. Chairman, to reach the highest standards, we are also holding contractors to those same standards.

I think this is something new for the contractors. They have been quite surprised, I believe, by how proactive and the monitoring that is taking place now.

Mr. RUNYAN. Do you have any examples of actual discipline?

Mr. HALLINAN. Well, I will give you an example of when gravesites are sodded by this contractor, they do turf repair, he was bringing in a piece of equipment that I felt was too large, that weighed too much, that was actually causing damage to the gravesite. So he would go in to water a gravesite and potentially and did damage other gravesites. So we have restricted him from using that machine and made him repair the gravesites that he damaged. But we had to work through the contracting process to hold that contractor accountable and we have done so.

Mr. RUNYAN. And I know you are a big proponent of the training center, the VA training center in St. Louis, how many of the employees have been through that program and what is the planning for the rest of them to attend it?

Mr. HALLINAN. In my former lifetime, Mr. Chairman, I was in charge of that National Training Academy. So we do have a signed agreement with the Secretary of the VA and the Secretary of the Army. I would say 10 to 15 percent of workforce has gone out to that academy to be trained. Ms. Condon's goal and my goal is to look at all the key positions and within a 36-month cycle, get those employees out for formalized training the training academy. But one thing I would like to point out under Ms. Condon's leadership and working with the supervisors on site, this week we have 4 of our senior equipment operators, which is more than 50 percent of the senior equipment operators in Arlington National Cemetery are out in Peoria, Illinois, being trained by Caterpillar to the highest industry and commercial standards.

So it is not just the VA that we have partnered with. We are sending our people out to be professionally trained. And we are looking for even more opportunities to have the people trained by outside sources, as well as the programs internally to train them on a daily basis. So we are going at a great pace, we have accomplished much, and as I said, we still have a lot to do. I would say to the Subcommittee, we are probably looking at a 36-month cycle to all the people trained up, and get the standard operating procedures in place and completely change the culture, and that is the goal.

Mr. RUNYAN. Thank you for that. Mr. McNerney, do you have any further questions?

Mr. MCNERNEY. Sure I have a couple, Mr. Chairman. Ms. Condon, is there any firm record of when those 69 boxes were first put into storage?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, that is part of the investigation, I do not know when they were put in that storage to date.

Mr. MCNERNEY. But as far as you know, that will likely come out with the investigation—

Ms. CONDON. Sir, I assume that it will.

Mr. MCNERNEY. Mr. Hallinan, how many interments a day do you conduct about?

Mr. HALLINAN. We average 27 to 30 interments a day.

Mr. MCNERNEY. When these take place, are there situations where there is crowding, where one is not out of the way before the next one begins, are they typically held out of site of each other in different parts of cemetery? How do you handle this sort of backlog in terms of crowding?

Mr. HALLINAN. There are logistics challenges dealing with the amount of interments that take place, and the final footprint that Arlington is on right now. A lot of the first interment and active interment sites are located in one area, sir. So there is a coordination and logistics problem or challenge for us. I would say in a majority of cases, that is not an issue, they are accomplished well and the families are quite pleased with the honors they receive and interment. But there are those places where we need to be careful, because of the amount of interments and the close proximity that we keep a close eye on the coordination.

Funerals that require full military honors, there is a strict time frame, they can be late, family members can be late and there can be delays, and it creates the potential for funerals to be too close to one another, but we are aware of the issue and we look to correct it. Right now we are on a small footprint, sir, when we conduct the first interments right now.

Mr. MCNERNEY. There have been incidents across the country where there have been demonstrations held at cemeteries, does that ever happen during interments? Has that ever happened at Arlington?

Mr. HALLINAN. Not to my knowledge, sir. Outside of the gates? Yes, but not at an actual interment, no, sir.

Mr. MCNERNEY. When problems are found on gravestones, do you have the authority just to make the change, or do you have to notify families or how does that procedure work?

Mr. HALLINAN. If we find a problem on a gravestone, we have the ability and the authority to make that change. But if it is something of a significant nature, it would be more of the interment; if there was an issue on the interment, that is when we would notify the families when we spoke about the cremation issue. If there is an error on a headstone, a date of birth of date is wrong, a date of death is wrong and we look at the records, the family gives us that information, the family signs for that information, and that information does not match what the family signed for, we can correct that internally.

Mr. MCNERNEY. Thank you. No more questions.

Mr. RUNYAN. Thank you, Mr. McNerney. Mr. Stutzman.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It seems like there was a desire from the VSOs for better communication, have you instituted a formalized or survey and analyzed its results or since you have taken over?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, I have not, but that is truly one of the things that we are working on with, I just finally staffed our public affairs office so that we now have the person power to actually reach out to put together our stakeholder forums, et cetera.

Mr. STUTZMAN. The next panel in some of their recommendations has suggested creating an e-mail list to notify spouses of events and changes of protocol, rules of policy, is this feasible to do?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, that would be really hard, but one of the things that we are currently working on is really altering and changing the current Web site at Arlington. So what we will do is we will use, that is the main way that we contact for people to get information. E-mailing each and every individual as just the numbers and the sheer volume would really be with the staff we have right now a task that would be impossible to do at the current time.

Mr. STUTZMAN. Do you have any idea what the number might be if you were to try?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, I would have to do some analysis on that and get back to you on what that would be.

[The DoD subsequently submitted the following information:]

There are approximately 7,000 individuals interred each year at Arlington National Cemetery. Creating an e-mail list would involve multiple family members for each of these. Based on two family members per interment, we estimate that a list spanning 20 years of interments (e.g., 1990-20n to current w00 e-mail addresses).

Mr. STUTZMAN. Okay. And then also, what about possibly putting together an advisory group of VSOs to get their feedback more quickly and to be more responsive to them, has that been discussed?

Ms. CONDON. That has currently been discussed with my new public affairs team where we really do want to get a group together of our VSOs and have an advisory group where we can share information and they can provide feedback to make Arlington even better than it is today.

Mr. STUTZMAN. I think that is really important. Any communication helps clear up miscommunication and misunderstandings, and I know the VSOs are obviously very interested in wanting to communicate, so I would definitely recommend that personally. Thank you, I yield back.

Mr. RUNYAN. Mr. Walz.

Mr. WALZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a couple of things on procedure now that you are in place, the way you are handling this. In March, it was indicated there were 3,500 grave reservations on file, some which may not be valid. We have had concerns from some folks that they have a legitimate reservation and now it is not being handled as such.

How are we working through that after that story came out of reservations that were given in an improper context than they should have? Where are we at on that status?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, as you know, we have grandfathered those reservations that were made prior to 1962, and we honor those based on the current eligibility for burial at Arlington, so we are taking care of those. As part of our Accountability Task Force, we are looking at all of the other potential reservations that could be—in checking to see if they still are valid and open, and so we are taking care of it that way as part of the accountability of each and every gravesite at Arlington.

Mr. WALZ. This might be for you, Mr. Hallinan, or either one of you. How long does it take on an average to get a burial time?

Mr. HALLINAN. It all depends on the type of honors that are going to be rendered. It can take anywhere from a couple of weeks to 3 to 4 months, sir.

Mr. WALZ. And is priority given to current warriors?

Mr. HALLINAN. Absolutely.

Mr. WALZ. Those are done immediately. A veteran of a previous conflict might have to wait?

Mr. HALLINAN. That is correct, yes.

Mr. WALZ. Without sounding callous but being also pragmatic here, who pays to wait the storage, if you will, before that burial happens? How does that work? If a veteran, an honor, someone who meets all the eligibility, that are ready to be buried and they are told it will be 4 months from now, how does that work?

Mr. HALLINAN. The cost will be incurred by the family, sir, a normal arrangement. Whether it is Arlington National Cemetery or another national cemetery, there is a wait involved.

Mr. WALZ. I can't speak on the best practice of this. Is that a reasonable amount of time to wait? I ask that in all earnestness, that I don't know if that is a reasonable amount of time if it ends up being months.

Mr. HALLINAN. It has been a normal wait time for Arlington National Cemetery, but that is something that Ms. Condon and I are looking at, with a goal of reducing the wait time.

Mr. WALZ. I appreciate that. I ask because I don't know that if that is a normal wait time and if a family understands it, because I hear from some of them that we didn't know we would have to incur this expense during that time period we were waiting for interment so I appreciate that.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. RUNYAN. Thank you, Mr. Walz. Mr. Johnson.

Mr. JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ms. Condon, when did you come to your position?

Ms. CONDON. June 10 of 2010, sir.

Mr. JOHNSON. The storage facility—now, you say your current process does not involve off-site storage facilities for the purpose of safeguarding paper records, they are all on site.

Ms. CONDON. Yes.

Mr. JOHNSON. Who was paying this storage fee of this off-site storage location?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, that would be part of the investigation. I do not know, but I would have to take that one for the record.

[The DoD subsequently provided the following information:]

The storage location was rented by Mr. Greaux.

Mr. JOHNSON. You don't know that it was coming out of your Department, you don't know who that was?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, I do not.

Mr. JOHNSON. This contractor that was involved, is that contractor still under contract in any way with the Department for anything else?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, I cannot speak for the Department, but they are not under contract at Arlington.

Mr. JOHNSON. Okay. Do you know if they are under contract within any other part of the Department of the Interior?

Ms. CONDON. No, sir, I do not. I would have to take that one for the record.

Mr. JOHNSON. I would appreciate it if you would take all of those questions for that.

[The DoD subsequently provided the following information.]

No, OS is no longer in business and neither it nor its owner have any current contracts with DoD.

Mr. JOHNSON. This particular contractor, do you know if they completed all of their work under the terms of that contract?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, that is part of the ongoing investigation.

Mr. JOHNSON. Do you know whether or not they were paid in full for the terms and conditions of their contract?

Ms. CONDON. No, sir, I do not.

Mr. JOHNSON. You don't know, or you can't say?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, I do not know all of the specifics there, but that is part of the ongoing investigation.

Mr. JOHNSON. Ms. Condon, in all due respect, it frustrates me just a little bit to get, "We can't talk about this because it is an ongoing investigation." We are not just an interest group, this is a Congressional panel. We hear classified information all the time. I am not sure I understand that.

Ms. CONDON. Sir, if I had the information and could share it I would, but I do not have the details of that.

Mr. JOHNSON. Okay.

Mr. JOHNSON. Do you know who the owner of that storage facility is?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, we do know who the owner was because he was the one who contacted us about finding the records that were there in the storage facility.

Mr. JOHNSON. And is it true that the reason they contacted your office was because of the lack of payment for the storage fee? Is that what originally—

Ms. CONDON. Yes, sir, that is.

Mr. JOHNSON. One final question here, I think. You know, I do applaud your Department's level of transparency in regards to this investigation with us. Why, though, did ANC not decide to release this information to the public?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, at the time when we did the original investigation on the information assurance part of that, if there was a potential where we thought that there was current personal identifying information, we would have immediately notified not only the families but we would have put a press release—and because of the ongoing investigation, that was the reason why we did not put a public press release out.

Mr. JOHNSON. When was that information assurance evaluation conducted?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, it was done immediately when we had the records in our facility.

Mr. JOHNSON. Okay. And when was that?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, we got the phone call on the 9th and we had them do the review on the 10th.

Mr. JOHNSON. The 9th of June?

Ms. CONDON. The 9th of June.

Mr. JOHNSON. Do you have any idea when to expect CID, assuming that they are indeed the agency with jurisdiction, are going to complete their investigation; have they said?

Ms. CONDON. Sir, they have not given me a date when they are going to complete the investigation so I do not know.

Mr. JOHNSON. Okay. I have no further questions, Mr. Chairman. Thank you again.

Mr. RUNYAN. Thank you, Mr. Johnson.

I guess we can see your team is—we hope it doesn't happen again, but you are still finding things hidden. It has been a long year for you, I can imagine. But, I think a lot of us agree when we look at the progress you have made and the structure you have put in place, we are moving in the right direction. We just hope it does not keep getting set back by new bad findings day in and day out.

So I thank you for your hard work and your dedication, and also Mr. Hallinan, for your service to this country. Thank you both. And with that, Ms. Condon and Mr. Hallinan, on behalf of the Subcommittee, I thank you both for your testimony and we look forward to continuing to work with you as we work through this difficult process on these very important matters. You are both excused.

I ask the next panel to please come forward. Good afternoon. With this panel we will be hearing first from Ms. Christina Roof, the National Acting Legislative Director for AMVETS. Then we will hear from Ms. Ami Neiberger-Miller, the Director of Outreach and Education for the Tragedy Assistance for Survivors (TAPS). And finally we have Dr. Vivianne Wersel, who is the Chair of the Government Relations Committee for Gold Star Wives of America, Incorporated (GSW).

We appreciate your attendance today and your complete statements will be entered into the record.

Ms. Roof, you are now recognized for 5 minutes for your statement.

STATEMENTS OF CHRISTINA M. ROOF, NATIONAL ACTING LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR, AMERICAN VETERANS (AMVETS); AMI D. NEIBERGER-MILLER, DIRECTOR OF OUTREACH AND EDUCATION, TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS; AND VIVIANNE CISNEROS WERSEL, A.U.D., CHAIR, GOVERNMENT RELATIONS COMMITTEE, GOLD STAR WIVES OF AMERICA, INC.

STATEMENT OF CHRISTINA M. ROOF

Ms. ROOF. Thank you. Chairman Runyan, Ranking Member McNerney, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. On

behalf of AMVETS, I would like to extend our gratitude for being given the opportunity to share with you our views, personal experiences, and recommendations regarding the issues at Arlington National Cemetery.

As we are all aware, last year the Army's Office of the Inspector General performed a detailed investigation into the activities that were occurring at Arlington National Cemetery. What the OIG uncovered directly affected AMVETS' membership and the families of countless others who have laid a loved one to rest at Arlington National Cemetery. AMVETS was saddened and, quite frankly, upset over the findings that OIG—excuse me, over the findings OIG released on the numerous disgraceful wrongdoings occurring at ANC. Furthermore, AMVETS is still at a loss for words as to how ANC's sacred grounds could have ever been so blatantly mismanaged in a way that showed absolutely no respect or care for the remains of our Nation's fallen heroes.

While AMVETS is eager to read OIG's follow-up report to the investigation in September, we still believe we must voice our concerns and problems experienced by our membership last year, if only in an effort to give our membership peace of mind and comfort to know their experiences are heard and understood.

AMVETS believes that it is important to preface our statement with the fact that we are not aware of all the improvements that have occurred at ANC as we, too, are awaiting the follow-up report. However, concerns we share with you today are still just as important and personal as they were a year ago. AMVETS strongly believes that the issues at ANC are a direct result of a broken chain of command, outdated technology, absence of updated internal policies, and failure to codify numerous operational policies and procedures. AMVETS finds it unacceptable that ANC has moved between multiple Army agencies over the past 30 years and yet no one agency or individual ever raised a concern or red flag about the happenings at ANC.

Furthermore, AMVETS believes that with the constant shifting of oversight at ANC, the Army has failed to maintain regulatory "proponency" in ensuring ANC was being run in direct compliance with Army Regulation 25-30. The Army's failure to enforce compliance to their own regulations, coupled with the failures of ANC's leadership to adhere to all regulations and to update internal SOPs, has resulted in our current situation in Arlington National Cemetery today.

The command and leadership structure for ANC was last codified in AR 290-5 in 1980, as well as in title 32, section 553, which was last updated in 1997. Although outdated, AR 290-5 in title 32 clearly outlines a delegation of responsibility to all the agencies involved with the care of ANC.

However, in 2004 the Army published General Order (GO) 13. This is entitled "Army National Cemeteries." AMVETS concurs with OIG's statement that "GO 13, at best, dilutes the responsibility, accountability and authority" of the organizational structure at ANC. However, what AMVETS does not understand is why the leadership of ANC failed to formally address the discrepancies in the updated policies compared to the old; or better yet, why they

do not make an effort to come to Congress so that these disgraceful events will be prevented from ever happening again.

Often updated policies and procedures do add confusion to past policies that have been in place. However, most responsible Federal agencies immediately address and fix these problems so that discrepancies—and fix the discrepancies. They don't choose to ignore them as ANC did. And I am starting to wonder if maybe it is still happening, as the information that the Chairman put forward today.

Numerous AMVETS members and their families have been personally affected by the mistakes that took place at ANC. AMVETS still continues to receive calls from our membership wanting to know if their loved one's remains are being properly cared for.

So with that being said, I would like to share with you what I have witnessed personally and experienced on a personal level through my interactions with those most affected by this ordeal.

Although we have tirelessly searched, AMVETS cannot find the proper words to explain to this Committee what it feels like to try and comfort our members so stressed over what they have seen in the news regarding mismarked headstones and improper care for remains, or even start to accurately express to you the feelings of uncertainty and fear these families have experienced.

While we can discuss the technical and legislative aspects of what has happened at ANC over and over in hearing after hearing, we must never forget that behind all of our discussions on policy and procedures are actual people such as these two brave women sitting next to me today and many of the members in the audience today.

Again, AMVETS understands that there is new leadership at ANC and we look forward to working with them to assist them in any problems they may have. We also look forward to working with this Committee in assisting you in whatever way possible.

Chairman Runyan and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my testimony and thank you for allowing me to go over.

Mr. RUNYAN. Thank you Ms. Roof.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Roof appears on p. 41.]

Mr. RUNYAN. Ms. Neiberger-Miller.

STATEMENT OF AMI D. NEIBERGER-MILLER

Ms. NEIBERGER-MILLER. Thank you. Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I am submitting testimony today on behalf of the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, known as TAPS. Founded in 1994, TAPS is the national organization providing compassionate care for all affected by a death in the Armed Forces.

I am the TAPS Director of Outreach and Education and my ties to Arlington National Cemetery are deeply personal. My father-in-law, Marine Corps Captain Norman Miller is buried in section 66, one of the sections identified in the OIG report as having significant discrepancies. My 22-year-old brother, Army Specialist Christopher Neiberger, was killed in action in Iraq in 2007 and is buried in section 60. So I have been at Arlington on the worst day of my life and it is deeply connected to all of us.

In my testimony, I will share some of the experiences of families, offer feedback about management, and provide suggestions for improvement.

Reactions among families of our fallen military and deceased veterans to the Office of Inspector General's report fell across a broad spectrum. There was anger, concern, confusion and no road map to guide our families or the Army. Some were so deeply grieving that to doubt a loved one's burial gravesite was impossible for them emotionally, and instead they would just turn off the news.

At TAPS, we have supported families coping with burial discrepancies at Arlington, and I will cite an example. Two months ago we were contacted by a veteran seeking to confirm that his late wife was in her marked gravesite. He said to me, "Although my fears are not completely dissolved by Arlington's assurances, I know that certainty can only be achieved by disinterment and DNA testing, and I am not prepared for such an invasive solution, I will just have to live with the uncertainty that Arlington's mismanagement has created and hope that my late wife and I are interred together." That is a truly sad statement.

While some have questioned why the Cemetery has not taken invasive steps more frequently in all of this, this example illustrates exactly how difficult resolving burial discrepancies can be and why the Cemetery's approach, leaving decisions on invasive measures to families, is the right one.

When we saw the Cemetery staff struggle over the last year, it was not with conducting routine burials, which they do at a very high level of excellence, but it was under unusual circumstances. TAPS provided support to two families who did pursue disinterment's due to suspected burial discrepancies. At the first disinterment, the family's fear was correct and other gravesites were disturbed to locate their loved one's remains.

In the second case, our staff were actually present at the disinterment. The family's son was buried in the correct gravesite. And at the time, our staff questioned the conduct of the Cemetery staff in how the disinterment was handled. We believe that the leadership learned from this experience and modified procedures.

In a third situation, our staff supported a reinterment. When the family arrived, the gravesite was not dug and the service delayed.

In two of these cases, there was a lack of communication with the service branch by the Cemetery staff. While much laudable progress has improved services for families and accountability at the Cemetery today, much remains to be done to satisfy the Office of Inspector General's 76 findings and 101 recommendations.

I would rate the team at Arlington National Cemetery about 40 percent of the way to the goal line. I expect that most of the deficiencies will be corrected within the next 2 years.

We were also asked to comment on the future of Arlington. TAPS would not oppose the transfer of Arlington National Cemetery to the VA. In our experience, surviving families placing their loved ones at VA cemeteries have high satisfaction rates. But at the same time, we are also pleased to continue working with the Army, and we would seek to work cooperatively with any agency managing the Cemetery.

We also offer the following recommendations:

Pursue all legal means allowable to render a full accounting of burial locations.

Write new rules for the *Code of Federal Regulations*.

Involve a focus group of bereavement professionals and policies for burial discrepancies.

Involve grief counselors alongside staff talking with families who are coping with burial problems, and for the long term, set up an advisory group of VSOs similar to the group that advises the VA's National Cemetery Administration.

Improve the Cemetery's Web site and resources, and do hold town hall meetings in cooperation with us and the other VSOs for families.

And improve relationships among the different service branches that are rendering honors at the Cemetery.

We can't go back and undo decades of mismanagement and poor recordkeeping, and we have to find a way together, forward, as a community that supports the surviving families of our fallen military and our veterans. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Neiberger-Miller appears on p. 43.]

Mr. RUNYAN. Thank you Ms. Neiberger-Miller. Dr. Wersel.

STATEMENT OF VIVIANNE CISNEROS WERSEL, AU.D.

Dr. WERSEL. Chairman Runyan, Ranking Member McNerney, Members of the Committee, I am pleased to testify on behalf of Gold Star Wives. Our intent is to inform this Committee of our Arlington experiences as well as the importance of Ms. Kathryn Condon's active role to help identify problems and gaps to improve the ceremony for others.

I am Dr. Vivianne Cisneros Wersel, Chair of the Government Relations Committee and surviving spouse of Lieutenant Colonel Rich Wersel, Jr., United States Marine Corps, who died suddenly a week after returning from his second tour of duty in Iraq.

I became a stakeholder of Arlington the day my husband was interred, 23rd February 2005. As his surviving spouse, I acquired the benefit to be buried with him when I die. When we sent our husbands off to war, we spent time planning for their homecoming, not their funeral. We never purchased the book what to expect when you bury your husband at Arlington.

For those who have not endured this experience, I will share with you my story and stories of other Post-9/11 surviving spouses. It was a day that deeply reflected our wedding, till death do us part. Many of us endured unfortunate experiences with the interment process, such as the wait time, paperwork for the headstone, and the lack of information about the protocol of the ceremony. This occurred while wading through our grief, and unfortunately disrupted the integrity of the ceremony.

We consistently hear from our members that the wait for a burial can be a most difficult period. Nicole lost her active-duty husband 24 February 2011. His civilian funeral was the following week; however, he could not be buried in Arlington until June due to the wait time. Her husband was placed in storage. His burial is

occurring as I speak, just shy of 4 months, and many of our members are with her today.

In addition to the financial cost of storage, there is an emotional toll on the family. We seek to raise awareness to the Committee as well as Arlington so that the situation can be improved for the wait time and issues with storage.

We are also aware of the fiasco of mismarking of many graves. Some of our surviving spouses asked for verification in the placement of their loved ones. Arlington handled the calls with dignity. A cross-reference check was done to help provide the families some peace of mind.

We are not aware of how the reconciliation process is validated. And as told, in 2010 Ms. Condon held a town hall meeting to listen to our concerns. Throughout the meeting, Ms. Condon was truly involved in the discussions to best answer our questions. The majority of concerns pertained to the procedural issues such as paperwork for the headstones. Many were rushed and frazzled. Some were merely questioned if the information presented was accurate. And we are not informed of options of personal inscriptions.

In my case, the Arlington representative asked me to review the workshop—excuse me, the worksheet when we were staging for the ceremony. I corrected the information and was unaware of options but had the fortitude to ask for the inscription “Loving Husband and Father.” However, in haste I forgot he was also a loving son.

Christian lost her husband in Afghanistan in 2010 and was never told she could have inscriptions, and was rushed through the paperwork as well.

The role of the representative needs to be more personal and active with the arrangements to assure the quality, dignity, and the honor of Arlington is maintained. We seek improvement of this process. There has been a lack of communication when policy changes with lithochrome headstones and headstone scriptures such as Operation Iraqi Freedom versus Operation New Dawn. Also, the clarification of who may be buried in section 60, why some were denied placement prior to Ms. Condon’s leadership when there was no existing policy.

Ms. Condon also presented an Arlington brochure that was in the final stages waiting for approval. This brochure is vital for a vital part of communication for the grieving family. Ms. Condon did her best to address all concerns. This meeting was very cathartic and a good beginning for making amends.

GSW offers the following recommendations: Decreasing the wait time for interment; addressing long-term storage of the service-member; training for the Arlington representatives; improving communications, starting with a brochure; establishing e-mail lists; notifying survivors of events, changes in protocol policy and rules; implementing working groups as stakeholders to address the concerns; hosting scheduled town hall meetings.

We are pleased to have Ms. Condon and the Army as the gatekeepers for Arlington. GSW recommendations are suggested to help improve the quality of the service of the interment of Arlington, to inspire trust and exceed the stakeholder’s expectations, and to decrease the understanding of the stakeholder’s needs.

I am proud and honored to say that my final address will be 2761 near the corner of Arnold and Eisenhower, section 66, Arlington National Cemetery. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony, and I can answer any questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Wersel appears on p. 52.]

Mr. RUNYAN. Thank you, Doctor.

Let's start the questions now. As we are moving forward and as I said in my opening statement, I believe we all concede that there were a lot of problems and a lot of heartache in the past. I think we are now moving in the right direction. And as we go through the communications, the wait time and all that, which I think Mr. Walz addressed earlier also in some of his questioning, have your members noticed an improvement in the operations, communications and all that? And I will start with you Ms. Roof.

Ms. ROOF. To the best of my knowledge our membership has not seen any improvements or any worsening.

Mr. RUNYAN. Ms. Miller.

Ms. NEIBERGER-MILLER. I would say we worked cooperatively with the administration prior to Ms. Condon and Mr. Hallinan as well. But one of the things that we observed, I actually had suggested the e-mail list that Dr. Wersel suggested to Superintendent Metzler probably 3 years ago. And we actually use a family grapevine essentially to distribute information, which is often not entirely foolproof, in getting information to families.

But I would say that for many of our families, being able to call into a call center where calls are tracked is very helpful. Knowing that no one is going to go into a senseless voicemail area; that their calls will be returned, I think is very important.

And when we proposed a town hall meeting to Ms. Condon upon meeting with her after she arrived at Arlington, she very enthusiastically endorsed that idea and agreed to participate. And TAPS facilitated that town hall meeting and invited other organizations and families to be part of it. So I just find that attitude to be very helpful. But we also did work cooperatively with the previous leadership as well.

Mr. RUNYAN. Dr. Wersel, do you have anything to add to your testimony? I think you answered it in your testimony.

Dr. WERSEL. I can tell you this, that the attitude has changed. If you give us a chance to voice the inequities or even the emotional feelings that a survivor goes through, it does help mend. And it is not until you start sharing stories with other survivors that you realize, wow, this is broken. And I honestly thought that my case was an isolated case. And what happens is that when you are active-duty military and there is a death, you lose your military friends and your new family becomes the Arlington family.

Most of us relocated to the Arlington area to be close to our loved one. My close family friends are our Arlington. And so we have been able to exchange our stories, and it hasn't changed in 5 years. So what the healing process to that is, we have been able to talk about it. But what is more important is to be able to share it with those who can make a difference, and that is the leadership of Arlington, because if we can make change we have to be able to voice our opinion.

Mr. RUNYAN. Thank you.

Ms. Neiberger-Miller, you said in your statement that you feel Arlington is about 40 percent of the way to the finish line. Is it just a matter of time or do you think they are being slowed down by obstacles.

Ms. NEIBERGER-MILLER. I think it is a combination of both factors. When you look at the OIG report, which is incredibly extensive, with 76 findings and 101 recommendations, and the problems that were identified were sweeping and systemic and they were cultural, to change all of that overnight is extremely difficult. And I think it is very reasonable to believe that it probably would take them a total of about 3 years to address all of those concerns. They were sweeping and massive. That may not be very fast, but I think is helpful.

Mr. RUNYAN. Do you feel there is any specific OIG recommendations that you or your organization specifically feel haven't been addressed?

Ms. NEIBERGER-MILLER. I would like to see some more movement forward hopefully on some of the policy and regulatory issues that were identified in the OIG report. Perhaps it is because of my background working with a major university with lots of policies. Because without those policies in place for how Arlington is supervised, how Arlington is managed for policies within the Army, you don't have a firm foundation to build on there.

And I know there are some significant legal challenges I believe for them in working out all of that for the *Code of Federal Regulations*, but it would be nice to see that move forward.

Mr. RUNYAN. And Dr. Wersel, do you see any benefit or need of any type of a special liaison or anything that could, pre- and post-interment help the family out?

Dr. WERSEL. I think so. I think we need—as a liaison, that person can be the advocate to make sure no one slips through the cracks. Just like I had previously stated, some of us have inscriptions on our headstones, some of us don't. As a liaison, they can make sure that the family is getting the information they need, if they are not quite sure of the protocol of the ceremony and that information has been provided, that liaison person can step in or even follow up and find out what went wrong.

But I think it is important to have some type of check and balance and accountability system in order to improve it for all families.

Mr. RUNYAN. Well, thank you very much. With that, I will recognize the Ranking Member, Mr. McNerney.

Mr. MCNERNEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for coming here to talk to us today. Ms. Roof, you were here for Ms. Condon's testimony. Did any of what she said give you any reassurance that things are changing there in terms of what you are looking for?

Ms. ROOF. It was good to hear that there is a system of updating SOPs, and it was actually very reassuring to hear them say that there were no SOPs in place when they took over. So hearing that they have updated internal policies is very reassuring. However, I am going to have to agree with their own testimony that, while much has been done, there is still much, much more to be done.

Mr. MCNERNEY. Do you think that the customer service hotline, or customer service is better now in terms of people that need to communicate with the ANC?

Ms. ROOF. I think the idea of the hotline is good, and it is a lot better than it was before. However, I would like to see a lot of that energy and effort that went into establishing that hotline to establishing something, like the Chairman had said and the ladies touched on, you know, a liaison; because while a hotline is great, there are other things that need to be addressed as well.

Mr. MCNERNEY. Thank you. Ms. Neiberger-Miller, what do you think could be done or would be the most important thing to do in terms of improving the service?

Ms. NEIBERGER-MILLER. Improving service for families?

Mr. MCNERNEY. Yes.

Ms. NEIBERGER-MILLER. I would like to see a liaison in place, similar to what Dr. Wersel discussed. You know, especially for active-duty deaths, the family is often in tremendous shock, and they are there and having to make decisions very rapidly about their headstones and about the ceremony. Even if they were informed about it, they may not remember it, they may not even recall it. So having a liaison in place I think would be very helpful.

Mr. MCNERNEY. Thank you. Ms. Cisneros Wersel, you mentioned something about long-term storage. What is long-term storage?

Dr. WERSEL. Say, for instance, our Nicole, who her husband is being buried today, that is 4 months of storage and that is pretty costly. And I believe the way the policy is, is that she is responsible for the payment. The Army doesn't—the way the procedure goes, they pay once the servicemember is interred, so there is a fee. And the funeral service directors vary in fees. Maybe it is gouged, but they do vary.

And Nicole, it just so happened, and I did do some following up. And the funeral director where he is, the price was very reasonable. They weren't gouging her. But over 4 months it does add up, and that is very costly for the family.

And, yes, there is the gratuity that the family receives for this unexpected expense, but still that is something that needs to be addressed. If there is 4 months of storage, is there an expected amount that should cost for storage? And that should be looked at. It varies.

Mr. MCNERNEY. You are at the mercy of a local funeral director, basically.

Dr. WERSEL. Exactly. And you can't go shopping and changing.

Mr. MCNERNEY. So there should be some standards. All of you may have a chance to answer this—is your working relationship with the current leadership satisfactory in terms of communication and responsiveness? We can start with you Ms. Wersel, Doctor.

Dr. WERSEL. The interactions we had with her in October was fantastic. I wanted to see more. I wanted to have another forum or another form of a follow-up, and where we are today, what is the status of that brochure, what is the status of how they are slowing down the process, the protocol of—or just even sharing the protocol to families. You know, how has that process changed?

But I would have liked to have seen a follow-up on what our recommendations were at that time with that meeting, what was dis-

cussed. And the protocol for you all who don't understand, you have no idea what to expect except somebody is going to give you a flag—you remember that part—and, you know, you get to sit down, and that is about all you get a grasp of.

And I will tell you a story that is a little funny and a little embarrassing, because I didn't realize the protocol. And they were going to give me a flag, and that part I got, while I was sitting there, the Marine Colonel came down and knelt down to give me the flag. So she is handing me the flag and she leans over toward me closer to my face. Well, I am Latin, I am thinking she is going to kiss me. So I came very close to giving her a little peck on the cheek, and what she was going to do was whisper in my ear. I had no idea she was going to whisper in my ear the delivery of—for a grateful Nation. So I was really thrown off the whole rest of the ceremony. I had no idea.

So as far as the communication with Arlington, I would like to know—getting together with Arlington, Ms. Condon, her staff—to know what is their role in providing information to the casualty officer, to the family; who has got the ball of providing that information to the family. And that is a communication process that needs to be improved. I would like to see that improved and more communication with Ms. Condon's staff.

Mr. MCNERNEY. And if you will allow me, what will be the best way for them to communicate with you?

Dr. WERSEL. Again, the forum. To have a stakeholder's meeting to find out or to have a liaison where they are meeting with casualty officers or the casualty officer, who is the person that is supposed to provide the protocol to the families on what to expect. Again, when we had babies we read that book, *What to Expect When You Are Expecting*. We knew what we were going to do.

We did not know what to expect with Arlington. And you can't do that funeral again, you can't do it again; it is done, it is over with.

So I would like to see what is in place to provide that information to brief the families on a ceremony that is only done once.

Mr. MCNERNEY. Thank you. My time is expired. I yield back.

Mr. RUNYAN. Thank you Mr. McNerney. Mr. Walz.

Mr. WALZ. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Well, thank you all first for being here, but most importantly, thank you for always being such staunch supporters of our veterans and their families and our survivors.

I thought Superintendent Hallinan made a really powerful statement, and something I am really glad to see. It tells me that there is a massive cultural change going on. This idea of getting policies in place, which each of you spoke about, to ensure continuity long after he and Ms. Condon are gone, long after this Committee is gone, because this has to be about forever of trying to get this right, the best that humans can do that.

So I think, and I think, Ms. Roof, you pointed out in your testimony, and I agree with you on this, this is going to take some collaboration and coordination. Army Pamphlet Example 1087, I think it is, is 20 years old now, and it is in direct contradiction to General Order 13 on how to do these funerals. There needs to be this collaboration.

It sounds to me like in our previous panel, there is getting cooperation with each of the services, because they are responsible for their part of the burial, and the casualty assistance officer and everything that goes with that. I think this Committee, along with our friends over in Armed Services could advocate a little push to the Army to update their manuals, to streamline and standardize them, and to bring them into that SOP alignment you are talking about.

Do you think that helps fix some of these things? I will let Ms. Roof start and then just if anyone else wants to.

Ms. ROOF. I do, I really do. First, like you said, updating them, going through and reviewing—for lack of a better term, sorry, the word escapes me—which don't work together. And then not only updating but going ahead and codifying the ones that need to be codified.

I think a lot of these things could have been avoided if there were actually laws in place instead of this pamphlet, that pamphlet. So I think it would be a good start.

Mr. WALZ. Well, I would agree with you. Taking checklists and things, I think all of us, especially dealing with military people, that checklists are the way to go. Because I struggle with this. I certainly find it hard to believe someone was that callous or whatever. But if you don't have systems and redundant safeguards in place, these types of things can kind of happen on their own. And that is unacceptable. And that is why these types of things are not just writing them down to please us or whatever. They are the absolute standard operating procedure so there is going to be no deviation.

So I agree with you. I was very happy to hear that with Mr. Hallinan. But I think we maybe need to push a little bit, because this is going to cross over into that, whatever it is at DoD, that I don't even know what happens there to try and get these types of things done, with some of these directives to be finished. So I appreciate that.

Again, I thank you all. We are taking away some good things on this. I do again commend the Chairman and the Ranking Member for holding this. I think it is what the public expects. We had an unthinkable situation here, but our responsibility was to, first, fix it; second, to make sure it never happens again; and I think we are on the path to doing that.

And again, if you hear some frustrations, Mr. Johnson was expressing some frustrations, the Chairman, myself, it is because we all know this is absolutely a zero-sum game. Every single burial must be perfect. We may never reach that goal, but it is one we set for ourselves. It is obvious that the new administrators and leadership accept that responsibility and are achieving that. And so you are right to come here, keep us on track to get there, but we are making progress.

So with that, I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. RUNYAN. Thank you, Mr. Walz. And ladies, on behalf of the Subcommittee I thank each of you for your testimony. We can definitely tell not only by your testimony and the emotion that you each expressed it with, that there is something wrong there that I think is being addressed. And I think we can agree on it.

We all agree that a human probably can't turn it around fast enough, and that is a frustrating part. As I said in my opening statement, I was made very aware of this by my constituent, Mr. Hopkins, early on in my still, I suppose, rather new Congressional career. So it was an honor having all of you here. Thank you for your testimony and you are excused.

I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material. Hearing no objection, so ordered. I thank the Members for their attendance today and the hearing is now adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:15 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

Prepared Statement of Hon. Jon Runyan, Chairman, Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs

Good afternoon and welcome. This oversight hearing of the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs will now come to order.

We are here today to monitor the progress of the new administration at Arlington National Cemetery after taking over following the shocking revelations in last year's Army OIG Report.

Before we get started however, I would first like to recognize Mr. Richard Hopkins.

Mr. Hopkins is a constituent of mine who has traveled from Marlton, NJ, to be with us here today.

Today's hearing is of great interest to Mr. Hopkins because his parents are buried at Arlington Cemetery.

I got to know Richard shortly after he discovered that the wrong headstone marked his parents grave.

He was understandably upset. As his Congressman I turned to Arlington for answers.

Working with Ms. Condon and her newly appointed team, Mr. Hopkins' problem was resolved and the headstone fixed.

I had the privilege of paying my respects to Mr. Hopkins' parents and seeing the new headstone with the correct names in person.

I believe this story highlights some of the heartache associated with the recent problems at Arlington.

We all know that 1 year at the helm of Arlington National Cemetery is not long enough to fix all of its problems.

Years, if not decades of neglect and mismanagement cannot be fixed overnight, but with the experience the new leadership brings, great strides have been made.

The troubles at Arlington existed on all levels—from the highly publicized problems with gravesite locations, low employee morale, and an IT system that was virtually non-existent despite several years of development and millions of taxpayer's dollars.

There have already been multiple hearings by other Committees on the past performance and issues at Arlington.

I want to be clear that it is not my intention to re-hash these issues and dwell on the past.

My focus, and that of this hearing, is on what the current administration at Arlington National Cemetery have accomplished thus far since taking over operation of the cemetery and how they plan to ensure these types of issues never occur again.

I believe one place to start is on the training of employees. As we all know practice makes perfect, and perfect is what our veterans and their families deserve.

I hope to hear an update from Ms. Condon about Arlington's efforts to provide continuing training to their employees.

Training of substance that will help prevent the cemetery from repeating its past mistakes and keep employees accountable; knowing the standard and keeping it.

I was encouraged by what I saw on my last visit to Arlington National Cemetery earlier this spring.

Every indication that I have received is that there is a new attitude of performance and accountability at Arlington.

Ms. Condon and her team have already put into action many changes that were needed and were long overdue.

And while much has been accomplished in just 12 months, there is still more hard work ahead.

I pledge the support of this Subcommittee to ensure all of last year's discrepancies cited by the OIG are corrected. I believe we all want this dark chapter in the cemetery's history closed for good.

I further offer the Committee's support to the Department of the Army, the families of those buried at Arlington, the Veterans Service Organizations and all interested Americans to work together to ensure a much brighter future for Arlington National Cemetery as the iconic symbol of respect our Nation has for all who have served their country.

I would now call on the Ranking Member for his opening statement.

**Prepared Statement of Hon. Jerry McNerney, Ranking Democrat Member,
Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs**

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Arlington National Cemetery is an unparalleled national treasure that serves a very unique mission.

From humble beginnings as just a potter's field in May 1864, Arlington National Cemetery became the preferred burial site for many of America's veterans and other dignitaries including U.S. presidents, Supreme Court justices, and many of those who died in the attack on September 11, 2001, Arlington has become a national shrine.

Each year, Arlington National Cemetery welcomes millions of visitors from both home and abroad and conducts thousands of burials of the highest honor.

However, as we've recently uncovered, we are falling far short of our national commitment on many fronts in Arlington National Cemetery. In particular:

1. **Archaic Record Keeping**—Arlington needs to update its antiquated system so that there is no doubt where any veteran is buried. It is way past time to move to a fully electronic system.
2. **Contracting**—Arlington needs to make sure that those with whom it contracts actually have the ability to deliver the desired end product or service.
3. **Mistaken Identities**—Numerous articles in the past months, particularly a March 23, 2011 *Time Magazine* article, highlight the cases of mistaken identities in various gravesites as well as mismarked graves due to avoidable burial errors.

Mistakes like these simply need not happen.

They are as avoidable as they are awful, and they rob us of time that could otherwise be spent ensuring that our Nation's heroes are properly laid to rest.

These mistakes also rob those who are left behind of the peace of mind they deserve.

Today, I look forward to finding out more about whether and why there are lengthy burial delays as has been reported by some survivors.

I also want to learn more about the 69 boxes of burial records recently found at a commercial storage facility by the owner who happened upon them in an abandoned unit—a fact that the ANC voluntarily disclosed to the Committee. How did they get there, and what, if anything, does this mean for the security of possible identifying information and the integrity of gravesite locations?

Finally, I'd like to know what Congress can do to improve these situations.

I am heartened by the dedication that Ms. Kathryn A. Condon, the Executive Director of the Army National Cemeteries Programs, brings with her, along with Mr. Pat Hallinan, the newly installed Superintendent.

I am hopeful that the Army National Cemeteries Program can avoid additional future shortcomings under their leadership.

I look forward to hearing an update on your December 2010 report to the DoD Inspector General and also where you plan to be in September 2011, when your next report is due.

Our veterans and their loved ones deserve a 21st Century, world class burial system that supports their final place of rest with surety.

Thank you to our panelists for appearing today. I look forward to working with you to maintain our promise to those who gave so much for our country.

Thank you, and I yield back.

**Prepared Statement of Kathryn A. Condon, Executive Director,
Army National Cemeteries Program, Department of the Army,
U.S. Department of Defense**

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide an update on progress at Arlington National Cemetery.

INTRODUCTION

Arlington National Cemetery is both the most hallowed burial ground of our Nation's fallen and one of the most visited tourist sites in the Washington, DC, area. A fully operational national cemetery since May 1864, Arlington National Cemetery presently conducts an average of 27 funerals each workday-final farewells to fallen heroes from the fronts of Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as to veterans of World War II, the Korean conflict, Vietnam and the Cold War and their family members. While maintaining the honor, dignity and privacy of each graveside service, Arlington National Cemetery hosts approximately 4 million guests annually. This duality of purpose serves to bring the national shrine of Arlington National Cemetery, and the sacrifices of those buried there, closer to the American people.

As the agency responsible for these two cemeteries, the Army is committed to rendering public honor and recognition through dignified burial services for members of the Armed Services and other qualified deceased persons where they may be interred or inurned in a setting of peace, reverence and natural beauty. On behalf of the cemeteries and the Department of the Army, I would like to express our appreciation for the support that Congress has provided over the years.

LEADERSHIP

I believe that the update that the Subcommittee requested can be most directly addressed by explaining how we have executed, and continue to execute, our leadership responsibilities. Army Field Manual 6-22, *Leadership*, defines leadership as "the process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation while operating to accomplish the mission and improve the organization."

Our statement explains how we have provided purpose and direction by establishing a clear and comprehensive vision and supporting mission statement. It continues by explaining how we have implemented management changes to improve the organization and increase the quality and efficiency. The impact of these changes is best described by reviewing the standards that have been established and their results in the areas of daily operations, customer service, records management, and fiscal responsibility. This leads us to a discussion of sustaining the cemetery for the future to be able to achieve the vision. In the end, I am confident that you will see the progress that has been made and the foundations for reestablishing the Nation's confidence in Arlington National Cemetery.

VISION AND MISSION

We have provided purpose and direction by establish a clear and comprehensive vision for Arlington National Cemetery that defines the desired future state:

America's premier military cemetery

- **A national shrine**
- **A living history of freedom**
- **Where dignity and honor rest in solemn repose.**

While the vision provides the long range goal that the organization is striving for, the mission is essential to provide clarity for daily operations. The mission is:

On behalf of the American people, lay to rest those who have served our Nation with dignity and honor, treating their families with respect and compassion, and connecting guests to the rich tapestry of the cemetery's living history, while maintaining these hallowed grounds befitting the sacrifice of all those who rest here in quiet repose.

MANAGEMENT CHANGES

To successfully accomplish the mission and put Arlington National Cemetery on the path to achieve the vision, there have been several management changes.

These changes started immediately at the top by clearly delineating roles, responsibilities and relationships. As Executive Director of the Army National Cemeteries Program I am a direct report to the Secretary of the Army, and is responsible to effectively and efficiently develop, operate, manage and administer both Arlington and the Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemeteries. The Superintendent of Arlington National Cemetery is my direct report, responsible to effectively and efficiently manage and execute daily operations.

Management functions have been consolidated within the Army National Cemeteries Program. The staff under my position as Executive Director has functional expertise in strategic management and communications, information management, and resource management. I am supported by ceremonial units from the Armed

Services, a detailed staff of chaplains, staff support from Headquarters, Department of the Army, and the Arlington Ladies who represent the Chief's and Commandant's of each Armed Service at funerals. The result is clearly defined roles, responsibilities and relationships.

My staff performs both an enabling function and an oversight role for the Superintendent's execution of daily operations. The intent is to enhance operations by removing administrative burdens from those responsible for execution, while having those administrative functions performed by subject matter experts and clearly segregating duties to ensure proper accountability and oversight.

We have refocused the execution elements of the workforce by establishing leadership positions and accountability where none existed before. There are now team leader positions and job assignments to better manage and execute daily operations. The Superintendent's statement will focus on the improvements to daily operations.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Arlington National Cemetery is truly about the living. It provides a means for the living to honor our fallen veterans and their families. It provides a unique lens on the history of freedom. But, first and foremost, Arlington National Cemetery, on behalf of the American people, lays to rest those who have served our Nation with dignity and honor, treating their families with respect and compassion. Hence, customer service is a critical priority.

When I arrived at Arlington National Cemetery the standard process for scheduling services or getting questions answered was to either call one of two toll numbers. If there was not someone immediately available to answer your call, you would be put on hold. That hold would last until one three things happened: the caller got tired of waiting, the wait hit the limit of just under an hour and the caller was transferred to a voice mailbox that was not set up, or a cemetery representative picked up the line. We cannot tell you how many calls went unanswered because of this system or how many people decided to go elsewhere. This undoubtedly led to frustration and also to frequent users finding ways to get priority.

To be responsive to each and every caller and to establish a uniform standard for scheduling we streamlined public interaction and telephonic communications by transitioning initial call screening to the Information Technology Agency's Consolidated Customer Service Center (CCSC) on December 13, 2010. The customized interactive voice response tree allows us to receive and track incoming calls. This has also forced us to document detailed processes and work instructions that reside in a searchable knowledge management database. The call center leverages CCSC's existing case management application customized for Arlington National Cemetery to document and track all customer interactions. We have trained a dedicated team of agents to answer, triage, resolve when possible, and document all calls. To date the call center has handled more than 23,432 calls, averaging 235 calls per weekday with 47 of those to schedule an interment.

Accessibility and preparedness for customers is also a priority. While the buildings were constructed prior to the American's with Disabilities Act, that is no excuse for a lack of accommodation. We have installed a handicapped ramp between Visitors Center and Administration Building for family members arriving by Metro. We have also constructed temporary ramps for placement curbside at interment services and include carpet for wheel chair access graveside. Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) have been installed at locations throughout the cemetery and staff have been trained on their usage to ensure immediate response when necessary.

While we are pleased with the progress to date to improve customer service, improvements will continue. We firmly believe in continuous process improvement and are working to establish feedback mechanisms to increase our understanding of customer concerns and needs.

RECORDS MANAGEMENT

To address identified information assurance deficiencies in the Department of the Army Inspector General report and based on the CIO/G-6 assessment, we commissioned the Army Data Center-Fairfield to transition the Interment Scheduling System to current hardware and software. The Army Data Center Fairfield completed this work and transitioned hosting of Arlington National Cemetery's business application to the U.S. Army Information Technology agency on November 23, 2010. This critical transition has ensured survivability of this mission critical application. We are now leveraging the Pentagon data disaster recovery capability and improvements to the Interment Scheduling System to allow scheduling to be transparent to the Joint Staff, Office of the Secretary of the Army, and all service force pro-

viders. The Army Data Center-Fairfield's continued support of the Interment Scheduling System and enhancements will enable a transition of the interment services branch to a fully digital organization.

The activities of Army Data Center-Fairfield provide a bridging solution to allow the Army and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to collaborate on a new acquisition to replace the current version of VA's Burial Operation Support System (BOSS). The VA-BOSS system is at the end of its life cycle and VA is planning the process for gathering requirements for a new acquisition. Army acquisition professionals have been tasked to oversee the programmatic delivery of a new system, at which time milestone decision points will be determined according to Department of Defense and Army acquisition standard operating procedures.

One of the biggest concerns upon arrival was the paper records and the lack of any backup of this information. We have been able to recover images from efforts in 2005 to scan the records. These images have been integrated by the Army Data Center-Fairfield with VA-BOSS records and Interment Scheduling System data from 2003 forward into a searchable database that provides both a digital tool and, more importantly, a backup for the vast majority of the authoritative records. This database will be expanded and form the basis of the accounting effort mandated by the Secretary of the Army and Public Law 111-339.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Arlington National Cemetery did not certify the FY 2010 year-end financial reports and schedules due to a lack of available accountability records. To remedy this issue for FY 2011, we accelerated the implementation of the General Fund Enterprise Business System (GFEBS) to 1 October 2010. GFEBS will provide the accountability, to include the ability to conduct required audits, to allow Arlington National Cemetery to certify year-end financial reports from now on.

Instrumental to fiscal responsibility was instituting disciplined processes, with oversight and direction, to enhance procurement operations. Executive Director policies and appointments are now in place to ensure a qualified senior-level staff member conducts funds certification; only the Director of Resource Management and the Budget Officer are authorized to certify funds. Similarly, funds approval is limited to the Executive Director and Chief of Staff. We developed and implemented a Gift Policy to ensure proper joint ethics accountability and approval for all gifts and profers made to Arlington National Cemetery. We initiated accountability of all Real Property and implemented a preventative maintenance and repair process to ensure care and maintenance.

I lowered the threshold for legal review of contracts to \$100,000. Recurring service contracts were extended to allow for a thorough review for requirements determination prior to re-competing all contracts. The current contract requirements have been consolidated in areas that allowed Arlington National Cemetery to gain efficiencies, streamline work efforts and limit the contractor footprint on the grounds of Arlington National Cemetery at any given time. The consolidated requirements went from 28 to 16. Each of the new service contracts has a Quality Assurance Surveillance Plan and a Performance Requirements Summary as part of the contractual requirement. These documents will assist our newly trained contracting officer representatives to hold contractors accountable for services.

To ensure accountability for the past, I have asked the Army Audit Agency (AAA) to return at the end of this fiscal year to ensure that the policies, procedures, and practices that have been established are indeed working and sufficient.

SUSTAINING ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

Arlington National Cemetery includes 624 acres of rolling hills with 20 miles of roads and the necessary infrastructure to support interment services, ceremonies, and visitation. Planned expansions include the 31 acres known as the Millennium Project and 42 acres that will come with the Base Realignment of the Navy Annex.

Under current estimates, Arlington National Cemetery expects to exhaust its availability for inurnments in niche spaces in Fiscal Year 2016. To preclude this from happening, we have accelerated investment in developing and constructing Columbarium Court 9 during this fiscal year. This investment will add approximately 20,300 niches to the inventory and with the follow on efforts in the Millennium Project, should allow Arlington National Cemetery to continue to offer inurnment services out to Fiscal Year 2037. We expect Columbarium Court 9 to be operational by November 2012.

Investment in the Millennium Project recommences in Fiscal Year 2012. When all five phases have been completed, this project will provide space for casketed remains, niches, and space for in-ground cremated remains. Continuation of this

project is critical to extend the viable life of Arlington National Cemetery and will permit us to offer multiple services to be performed simultaneously across the expanse of the cemetery.

Arlington National Cemetery now has a dedicated engineering staff and has recently completed a comprehensive assessment of the current status of all facilities and infrastructure. This draft Ten-Year Capital Investment Plan for Arlington National Cemetery is to assist top-level management to manage, plan, budget, and acquire capital assets that will best serve the mission effectively. The draft is a living document that is updated regularly. It is flexible so the decision makers can change the project implementation schedules. The plan intends to highlight and address potential spikes (i.e., large, one-time increases in annual appropriations) that may have an impact on other necessary projects. It also establishes a process for managing the portfolio of capital assets to achieve performance goals with the lowest life-cycle costs and to minimize risks.

We are committed to maintaining Arlington's grounds and infrastructure in accordance with the standards expected of a National Shrine while also maintaining the cemetery's viability as an active cemetery for those who continue to serve our Nation.

CONCLUSION

I hope that the highlights of the actions taken and changes implemented demonstrate the progress that has been, and continues to be, made to restore the Nation's confidence in Arlington National Cemetery. I would like to thank the Subcommittee for taking a positive leadership role in the oversight of Arlington National Cemetery.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes our testimony. We will be pleased to respond to questions from the Subcommittee.

Prepared Statement of Patrick K. Hallinan, Superintendent, Arlington National Cemetery, Department of the Army, U.S. Department of Defense

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about Arlington National Cemetery. I was appointed as the Superintendent of Arlington on October 10, 2010, and served as the Acting Superintendent since June 10, 2010.

I was the Director of the Office of Field Programs, National Cemetery Administration for the VA since Oct. 20, 2008, and was responsible for developing and implementing National Cemetery policy, procedures, and guidance related to national cemetery operations. I had oversight responsibilities for five Memorial Service Network offices, 131 national cemeteries, 3.1 million gravesites and 19,000 acres..

I began my career in Federal service, working as a temporary caretaker for the National Cemetery Administration when I was honorably discharged from the Marine Corps. I have spent my entire Federal career in cemetery operations and see being the Superintendent of Arlington National Cemetery as the highpoint of my 37-year career.

First and foremost, Arlington National Cemetery is an active cemetery conducting approximately 27 funerals per day. We consider it part of our sacred trust to ensure that each funeral is executed with the utmost dignity and respect. Every veteran's, and eligible dependent's, funeral receives our full attention to detail. Daily operations are critical to maintaining one of the unique hallmarks of Arlington National Cemetery, multiple simultaneous private grave side interments with full honors. Neither the importance nor complexity of this hallmark can be overstated.

To establish accountability while maintaining this hallmark, standards were developed throughout the operation where none existed. The leadership team is training the workforce to implement these standard operating procedures. We are holding supervisors and leaders responsible and accountable for meeting our established standards. All supervisors are responsible for quality control in the cemetery. My staff and I spend at least 60 percent of every day in the cemetery, regardless of weather conditions, observing daily operations and ensuring expected standards are being met.

New standards for chain of custody have been implemented to maintain positive identification of casketed or cremated remains from the time they arrive at the cemetery until they are secured in their final resting place. For casketed remains a system of six checks are made by the cemetery representative to ensure positive identification: cemetery representative validated daily interment schedule with family; a non-biodegradable tag is placed on the casket containing the name of the deceased,

date of death, date of interment, section and grave number and checked with the section and grave number painted on the concrete lid of the grave liner; section and grave number are painted on inside the grave liner; temporary grave marker contains name, dates, section and grave number; and headstone (if applicable).

A "dig slip" is now the standard for excavation of a grave being opened for a second interment. This standard assists in preventing the unintentional removal of interred cremated remains during the excavation of a grave. The dig slip is issued to the equipment operator and must be verified by the equipment operator before opening the grave. Similarly, niche covers in the columbarium are not removed for the second interment until the cemetery representative is present. This standard prevents cremated remains from being left unattended in an open niche prior to a service. All cremated remains received at the cemetery are tagged with a non-biodegradable tag and maintained in a locked area until required for the funeral service. A concrete government grave liner made specifically for urns is now used for gravesites where cremated remains are interred. This procedure effectively eliminates the improper or unintentional disassociation of cremated remains from their assigned gravesite.

Supervisors and work leaders are being trained regularly by the cemetery leadership on standards for the correct layout of burial sections according to burial maps, accurate assignment of gravesites, and correct procedures for closing graves. The Army has a memorandum of agreement with the Department of Veterans Affairs leveraging training at the National Cemetery System, Veterans Administration training site in St. Louis. Contracting officer representatives throughout the cemetery workforce are holding contractors working in the cemetery to the standards of the contracts. Contracts have quality assurance plans and contractors are being monitored and held accountable to fulfill all contractual obligations and for any damage sustained to government property.

Standards are in place to ensure that all sections of the cemetery are tamped correctly to minimize graves and headstones from sinking. A sifter was procured to ensure fill soil for closing of graves is now sifted prior to use to improve effectiveness of the tamping process when closing a gravesite. Additionally, all first interment sections are raked level, clear of any excess rocks, to present a neat and cared for appearance. As soon as possible (seasonal restrictions apply) a stand of turf is created either by adding a layer of topsoil, seeding, and fertilizing or installing sod. We are now using hand operated gas tampers in second interment sections to close graves correctly. Attachments for tractors have been added to rake large first interment areas substantially improving the overall appearance of the cemetery. Government markers (headstones) are being installed and checked against the newly established standard in the cemetery. Government markers are installed with 24"-26" of stone visible above the ground. Headstones are installed using the permanent monumentation in the sections and checked with a level to ensure that they are aligned vertically and horizontally.

Daily operations have been enhanced through the establishment, training and enforcement of standards, by optimizing procedures, and by procuring the right equipment for each task. This ensures full accountability of all remains that are interred or inurned and higher quality of interment services and grounds keeping. The result is full confidence that individuals are laid to rest in the correct gravesite or niche and an significant increase in the appearance of the cemetery.

The cemetery averages 47 new requests for burial each day. We average 27 interments per day. To address this issue, Arlington National Cemetery initiated Saturday interment operations on May 14, 2011. These are placement only services, where no honors have been requested and allow some of the additional demand to be met. In addition, we are working to increase the daily number of services to average 30 interments.

Arlington National Cemetery is hallowed ground, consecrated by the American Heroes buried here. As a veteran, and father of a Marine, I am truly honored to be the Superintendent of Arlington National Cemetery. I am here to move forward to correct the mistakes of the past and restore the faith of the American public in the operations at Arlington National Cemetery.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I will gladly respond to any questions the Subcommittee may have.

**Prepared Statement of Christina M. Roof, National Acting Legislative
Director, American Veterans (AMVETS)**

Chairman Runyan, Ranking Member McNerney and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of AMVETS, I would like to extend our gratitude for being given the opportunity to share with you our views and recommendations regarding Arlington National Cemetery and the new administration.

AMVETS feels privileged in having been a leader, since 1944, in helping to preserve the freedoms secured by America's Armed Forces. Today our organization prides itself on the continuation of this tradition, as well as our undaunted dedication to ensuring that every past and present member of the Armed Forces receives all of their due entitlements. These individuals, who have devoted their entire lives to upholding our values and freedoms, deserve nothing less.

As we are all aware, last year the United States Army's Office of the Inspector General (OIG) preformed a detailed investigation into the activities of Arlington National Cemetery (ANC). What OIG uncovered directly impacted AMVETS membership and the families of countless others who have laid a loved one to rest in Arlington National Cemetery. AMVETS found OIG's report to be not only upsetting, but also incredibly disgraceful. AMVETS could not believe the numerous wrong doings OIG outlined in their report, or that these sacred grounds could have ever been blatantly mismanaged in a way that showed no respect or care for the remains of this Nation's fallen heroes. While AMVETS is eager to read OIG's follow-up report to the investigation, we still believe that we must voice the concerns, recommendations and problems experienced by our membership last year, if only in an effort to give our members the comfort of knowing their experiences are understood. Moreover, AMVETS believes that it is important to preface our statement with the fact they we are not aware of all of the improvements already in place at ANC, as we too are awaiting the Army's new report. However, the concerns we share with you today are still just as important and personal as they were 1 year ago.

AMVETS strongly believes that the issues at ANC are a direct result of a broken chain of command, out-dated technology, absence of updated internal policies and failure to codify numerous operational policies and procedures. AMVETS finds it unacceptable the ANC has been moved between multiple Army agencies over the past 30 years, and yet no one agency or individual ever expressed concern over the happenings at ANC. Furthermore, we believe that with the constant shifting of oversight at ANC, the Army failed to maintain regulatory "proponency" in ensuring ANC was being run in direct compliance with Army Regulation 25-30, issued in 2006. The Army's failure to enforce compliance with their regulations coupled with the failures of ANC's superintendent and senior leadership to adhere to the regulations and update internal Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) has resulted in numerous grave mismarkings, improper handling of remains and immeasurable stress and grief, which the families of these fallen heroes must now endure.

The command and leadership structure for ANC was last codified in AR 290-5 in 1980, as well as in Tile 32 Section 553 which was last updated in 1997. Furthermore, Department of the Army Pamphlet DA PAM 10-87 entitled "Administration, Operation and Maintenance of Army Cemeteries" has not been updated since 1991 and lastly, GO 13 entitled "Army National Cemeteries" was last updated in 2004. The first two documents clearly outline the delegation of responsibilities to all of the agencies involved with the care of ANC, however GO 13 seems to add confusion and opposing policies to those outlined in AR 290-5 and DA PAM 10-87. In fact according to the OIG, "GO 13, at best, dilutes the responsibility, accountability and authority of Military District of Washington as an organizational structure over ANC, and at worst, effectively strips the organizational level structure out of the equation, encumbering strategic and direct level structures with the tasks to lead and manage functional areas in which they are not resourced."

The overall operational inefficiencies seem to be a direct result of outdated and/or non-existent SOPs and internal published policy guidelines. According to OIG ANC staff reported that they had never even seen an SOP and the few that did exist were very outdated. It is in the opinion of AMVETS that ANC was only able to function below the radar for as long as they did because of the experience of the current staff and very low turnover rates. However, AMVETS finds it to be unacceptable and irresponsible to operate any cemetery without regularly updated SOPs and policies, regardless of the experience level of the cemetery's personnel. The OIG's findings further confirm AMVETS belief in utilizing updated SOPs and the necessity for regular oversight. AMVETS believes if ANC leadership and the Department of the Army had adhered to and followed policies, regularly updated their regulations and practiced even the most basic oversight, these grave injustices could have been avoided all together.

AMVETS strongly believes that ANC should look to the practices and procedures of the Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemetery Administration (NCA). NCA has robust and regularly updated procedures, policies and codified laws called for. Furthermore, NCA has utilized an electronic tracking system for all of their interments since the 1990's. NCA also continually demonstrates transparency in their daily operations and has always been forthcoming with any problems they may be experiencing. NCA has always looked to Congress at the start of any problem so that policies could be updated and codified in order to prevent the exact events that have occurred at ANC.

AMVETS also believes that the leadership of ANC should look to NCA for methods of key decision-making. In the past ANC mid-level managers have made all of the key decisions regarding employees and daily operations without looking to higher level management, the employees themselves or even outside resources that could have been provided by the Department of the Army. Instead, ANC chose to make all of these decisions on their own, which in turn created an unhealthy organizational climate and led to the numerous mistakes regarding interment on ANC grounds. While AMVETS understands that there is new leadership at ANC, we strongly urge the new administration utilize the assistance NCA has offered numerous times over the past 15 years with the implementation and completion of ANC's automation process.

When comparing the cost of what it took NCA to establish and implement their automated system to that of what ANC has already spent over the last decade trying to develop and implement their own automated system, AMVETS believes ANC accepting the outside assistance from NCA stands to be the most timely and fiscally responsible manner in which ANC can finally complete their automated system.

As you know, AMVETS is one of this country's most inclusive Veterans Service Organizations. Our membership is comprised of veterans, active duty personnel, National Guard and Reserve and through AMVETS subsidiary organizations, their families. Numerous AMVETS members and their families have been personally effected by the mistakes that took place at ANC. AMVETS still continues to receive calls from our membership wanting to know if their loved ones remains are still being properly cared for, as well as calls from concerned members wanting to know how they can get in touch with ANC to check on the status of their loved ones interments. So, that being said, I would like to stray from my usual testimony style and share with you what I have witnessed and experienced on a personal level through my interactions with those directly affected by this ordeal.

Although we have tirelessly searched, AMVETS cannot find the proper words to explain to this Committee what it feels like to try and comfort our members so distressed over what they have seen in the news regarding mismarked head stones and improperly cared for remains, or to even start to accurately express to you the feelings of uncertainty and fear these families have experienced. Personally, I have witnessed emotion ranging from pure anger to extreme sadness and even guilt by a few who wondered if they had made the wrong decision in having their loved one laid to rest at what they believed was supposed to be one of this country's most sacred and well kept cemeteries. While we can discuss the technical and legislative aspects of what happened at ANC repeatedly, we must never forget that behind all of our discussions on policies and codifying practices are real people. Moreover, these are the men and women who have sacrificed and even died for our country. While, I usually try and leave people's personal tragedies out of policy discussions, I truly believe that this is one of the times when we actually need to include it. When the only comfort I have to offer to my membership is an ANC hotline number and hopeful, yet unverified, reassurances that the Department of the Army and Congress will quickly right all of the "wrongs" that have happened, is simply not good enough.

Again, AMVETS understands that new leadership was brought into ANC to address all of the problems and that there has possibly been great strides in rectifying all of the problems OIG reported last year, however the simple fact still remains that this happened and there must be immediate changes to and the codification of the policies and procedures utilized at ANC. AMVETS stands ready to assist this Committee and the leadership of ANC in any way needed, so that we can all rest assure that this will never happen again.

Chairman Runyan and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my testimony and I stand ready to address any questions you may have for me.

Prepared Statement of Ami D. Neiberger-Miller, Director of Outreach and Education, Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Because of our role in caring for thousands of families of America's fallen military since 1994, the Tragedy

Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) is uniquely qualified to comment on this matter. Ami Neiberger-Miller is a surviving family member with multiple loved ones interred at Arlington National Cemetery. In my role as a TAPS staff member, I have worked with several families to communicate with Cemetery administrators under both the old and new leadership.

I. Evaluation of Progress to Date In Addressing Deficiencies in the 2010 Inspector General's Report

- Family reactions to the Army Inspector General's report were mixed and fell across a wide spectrum.
- TAPS praises administrators for positive steps: an upgraded phone system, addressing manpower shortages, and instituting consistent policies and procedures among the Cemetery workforce.
- In spite of this progress, much remains to satisfy the 101 recommendations and 76 findings in the Inspector
- General's report. After steady progress, I would rate the team at Arlington National Cemetery about 40 percent of the way to the goal line.
- Regulatory deficiencies and the slow pace of work updating the *Code of Federal Regulations* leave the new leadership without a firm foundation upon which to build a future for the Cemetery.
- Families grappling with questions about verifying the burial locations of their loved ones at the Cemetery have struggled to understand the information given. Securing assurance for some families has been problematic, especially given the nature of the antiquated paper recordkeeping system and the potential emotional wounds opened by invasive measures.
- Cemetery leadership have struggled when conducting dis-interments and re-interments, and also struggled at times with connecting families to the branch of service.

II. Opinion on the Future of Arlington National Cemetery

- Some within Congress and others are calling to transfer the Cemetery to the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- There is not a consistent opinion among surviving families on this matter. I know a few families who support the Cemetery remaining under the Army's management. What matters to families is the care and support they and their loved ones receive from the management of the Cemetery.
- VA cemeteries rate highly with surviving families. TAPS would not oppose a transfer to the VA.
- TAPS would work cooperatively with any agency managing Arlington National Cemetery.

III. Recommendations for Improvements in Cemetery Operations

- Continue to pursue all legal means to render a full accounting of the burial locations at Arlington National Cemetery.
- Write and promulgate new administrative rules for the *Code of Federal Regulations* for the Cemetery.
- Involve a focus group of bereavement professionals accredited by the Association of Death Education and Counseling, TAPS, the National Funeral Directors Association and surviving families in discussing the procedures being taken to correct burial discrepancies at the Cemetery.
- Involve trained bereavement counselors and social workers alongside Cemetery staff in talking with surviving families who are grappling with issues related to the burial locations of their loved ones.
- Set up an advisory group comprised of Veterans Service Organizations to provide input to the Cemetery administrative staff and offer feedback, similar to the group already in place that the VA consults.
- Communicate more fully with surviving families and the American public about the steps being taken to correct burial discrepancies at the Cemetery.
- Hold town hall meetings in cooperation with TAPS for surviving families.
- Improve cooperative relationships among the military service branches that render honors at the Cemetery.

- Update the floral policy for the Cemetery to be consistent with current grieving practices and include mementoes in the policy, as well as collection procedures.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to have the opportunity to submit this testimony on behalf of the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS). TAPS is the national organization providing compassionate care for the families of America's fallen military heroes. TAPS provides peer-based emotional support, grief and trauma resources, seminars, case work assistance, and a 24/7 resource and information helpline for all who have been affected by a death in the Armed Forces. Services are provided to families at no cost to them. We do all of this with no financial support from the government because TAPS is funded entirely by the generosity of the American people.

TAPS was founded in 1994 by a group of surviving families following the deaths of their loved ones in a military plane crash. Since its founding, TAPS has offered comfort and care to more than 30,000 people. The journey through grief following a military death can be isolating and the long-term impact of grief is often not understood in our society today. On average, it takes a person experiencing a traumatic loss 5 to 7 years to reach his or her "new normal."

TAPS has extensive contact with the surviving families of America's fallen military servicemembers, making TAPS uniquely qualified to comment on issues affecting the survivors left behind. Since 1994, our 24/7 resource and information helpline has received approximately 184,260 calls from survivors. In 2010, TAPS received an average of 68 calls per day from military survivors and placed 264 calls per day to survivors. TAPS intaked 2,864 newly bereaved military survivors in the last year and received 10,649 calls to our 24/7 resource and information helpline. Last year, TAPS placed approximately 63,452 calls to survivors to let them know they were not alone, follow up on a case inquiry, or discuss needed services and support. One hundred percent of our 42 professional staff members are survivors of a fallen military hero or military family members. Ninety-eight percent of our total workforce are volunteers, including active military servicemembers, who have donated 48,000 hours of their time in the last year to be trained in how to companion a child who is grieving and volunteer their time to support the children left behind by our fallen.

My name is Ami Neiberger-Miller, and I am the director of outreach and education at TAPS. I am a surviving family member of our fallen military and have deep personal connections to Arlington National Cemetery. Tragedy struck my family in 2007 when my 22-year old brother, U.S. Army Specialist Christopher Neiberger, was killed in action in Baghdad, Iraq. My brother is buried in section 60 at Arlington National Cemetery. My father-in-law, U.S. Marine Corps Captain Norman Vann Miller, who died in 2003 of natural causes, is buried in section 66 at Arlington National Cemetery, which is one of the sections identified in the Inspector General's report as having significant problems with burial discrepancies. Additional relatives of my family are interred in other locations in the Cemetery. The beginning of my grief journey after my brother's death is part of the HBO film, "Section 60: Arlington National Cemetery," which describes the community of families that grieve together at the Cemetery. I began working with TAPS in October 2007. In my role as a staff member with TAPS, I have supported many surviving families of our fallen military and veterans in communicating with the administration of Arlington National Cemetery from 2007 to date.

I have been asked by the Subcommittee to "provide written comments on TAPS' views on the efforts by the new administration at Arlington National Cemetery to correct the egregious deficiencies documented in last year's Inspector General's report." I was asked "to include your evaluation of their progress to date in addressing these issues, with particular attention given to the degree of accountability and transparency exhibited, and your expectations regarding their timeline and plan for full correction of all noted deficiencies. I was also asked to provide comment to the Subcommittee "regarding the future of Arlington National Cemetery and any recommendations for improvements in the Cemetery's operations."

In response to the Committee's request, my testimony will be segmented into the following three sections: (I) evaluation of progress to date in addressing the egregious and massive systemic deficiencies documented in the 2010 Inspector General's report, (II) opinion on the future of Arlington National Cemetery, and (III) recommendations for improvements in the Cemetery's operations.

I. Evaluation of progress to date in addressing the deficiencies documented in the 2010 Inspector General's report

On June 10, 2010, the Army Inspector General published a report into egregious deficiencies in management and operations at Arlington National Cemetery. The contents of the report were difficult for many families of our fallen military and deceased veterans to hear about. We began receiving calls at TAPS from concerned families even before the news conference announcing the report had ended.

TAPS issued a statement the same day in response saying, "TAPS believes that Army Secretary John McHugh and the military's leadership are working actively to ensure that Arlington National Cemetery is managed in a manner that befits the service and sacrifice of the more than 330,000 servicemembers and their family members who are interred there." The statement also noted that the Army "apologized to the community of surviving families, and is taking immediate action to correct this situation and to assure families."

For families with loved ones interred at Arlington National Cemetery, in my experience, reactions to the Inspector General's report fell across a broad spectrum:

- Some families were horrified, angry, and deeply concerned about the mismanagement of the Cemetery and the burial locations of their loved ones.
- Some families felt worried and were afraid that they had spent months, and even years, visiting a gravesite that their loved one might not be in.
- Many were confused and unsure what they should ask the Cemetery to confirm their loved ones' burial locations.
- Some families had difficulty interpreting and understanding what the Cemetery told them, even after they called seeking confirmation of a loved one's burial location.
- Some families were so deeply grieving that to even doubt, for an instant, a loved one's burial location, was an emotional leap they could not make. These families either turned off the television or put down the newspaper every time a story came on about the problems at Arlington National Cemetery, or clung to hope that their loved one's gravesite was not affected.
- Some families were deeply private about their concerns and chose to discuss them internally and reach consensus before making a call to the Cemetery.
- Some families were starkly pragmatic, noting that regardless of burial location, their loved ones were gone, and nothing could bring them back.

The situation posed by burial discrepancies and mismanagement at Arlington National Cemetery is unprecedented. No family should ever have to wonder if their loved one is interred in the correct and marked location. There is no road map to help these families. In June 2010, there was also no road map for the Army and the new leadership team at the Cemetery in how to respond to family concerns.

Working with bereaved and concerned families requires the utmost sensitivity. Training in bereavement and support from mortuary affairs professionals, Veterans Service Organizations, TAPS military bereavement professionals, and others could have saved the families and the Army much heartache and made this process less painful for all involved.

In spite of these challenges, I believe the Army has made positive strides in addressing these problems by taking the following steps:

- Continuing the tradition of executing with great professionalism and care an average of 27–33 military funerals per day. Eight of these funerals involve full military honors with a caisson. As many as 5 funerals occur at the same time. In addition to executing the complicated logistics required for simultaneous and constant military burials, the staff at Arlington National Cemetery also support an average of 8 wreath-laying ceremonies per day at the Tomb of the Unknowns, host dignitaries and heads of state, and host 4 million visitors annually who learn about our Nation's history and legacy of military service.
- Instituting consistent policies and procedures for Cemetery operations staff to ensure that future burial or interment mistakes are not made.
- Instituting a healthier workplace culture that encourages employees to come forward if they make mistakes and correct them quickly, evidenced by prior Congressional testimony submitted by Superintendent Hallinan.
- Sending staff members to training in cemetery operations management.
- Upgrading the phone system at the Cemetery so the public and surviving families can communicate more effectively with the staff.
- Hiring a new superintendent and deputy superintendent with military cemetery management experience.
- Hiring a director for the Army Cemeteries Program who reports directly to the Secretary of the Army.

- Taking steps to hire additional staff to address the documented and significant manpower shortage at the Cemetery.

However, in spite of this laudable progress, much remains to be done to satisfy the 76 findings and 101 recommendations made in the Inspector General's report, released almost a year ago. The management problems revealed at Arlington National Cemetery were massive, systemic, and sweeping.

After a year of steady progress, I would rate the team at Arlington National Cemetery about 40 percent of the way to the goal line. That may not be entirely satisfying to Congress or to the public, but when you consider the serious and systemic deficiencies identified in the Inspector General's report, it's not surprising. Assuming their progress remains at this steady pace, I would expect that most of the deficiencies will be corrected within the next 2 years.

I personally believe that satisfying the recommendations of the report will require a team approach, because it is a community that is impacted by the problems at Arlington National Cemetery. This team should involve leadership at the Department of Defense, Army officials and staff, mortuary professionals, the National Funeral Directors Association, the Association of Death Education and Counseling, military bereavement professionals from TAPS, surviving families of veterans and our fallen military, the American public, Congress, and many others. **Now, I'd like to discuss a few areas where improvement is needed and may require a team approach.**

There is a significant need to address regulatory deficiencies impacting Arlington National Cemetery. The Inspector General found that all governing documents for the Cemetery were outdated, noting that the "*Code of Federal Regulations*, Army regulations, and Standard Operating Procedures are outdated and unsynchronized."

Many of the serious policy and regulatory issues identified in the Inspector General's report remain un-acted upon. I've heard that while some headway has been made in this regard internally, that these new regulations are being held up by legal concerns.

Many of these items require not just action by the Army and the new leadership team in place at Arlington National Cemetery, but steps will also need to be taken by Department of Defense leaders to update and address Federal and army regulations, in accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act.

While the introduction of new standard operating policies and procedures at Arlington National Cemetery itself have significantly improved day-to-day operations, new Federal regulations and Army regulations must be proposed and approved to address the tangled web of conflicting policies and regulations identified by the Army Inspector General and ensure a firm foundation upon which to build the next chapter in Arlington National Cemetery's history.

Arlington National Cemetery has had difficulty at times communicating with families of veterans and servicemembers interred at Arlington National Cemetery who called seeking confirmation of a loved one's burial location. Immediately following the release of the Inspector General's report in June 2010, concerned survivors of veterans and our fallen military began calling Arlington National Cemetery seeking confirmation of their deceased loved ones' locations, with particular concern being voiced from families of those interred in sections 59, 65 and 66 where 211 mismarked or misidentified gravesites had been identified by the Inspector General. The problems were so massive and systemic, that families with loved ones interred in other sections of the Cemetery not mentioned in the report were also concerned.

Typically, families calling the Cemetery with inquiries were given information found in the Cemetery's antiquated and non-digitized 3x5 card recordkeeping system. The families sometimes struggled to understand how to interpret what they were being told. To many, it seemed impossible to confirm burial locations from just these records, in an atmosphere where families did not always trust what they were being told.

Even if graves were photographed, the family located additional burial paperwork of their own from the time of the funeral, and additional information was given to the family, some families were left wondering how to interpret this data. Families sometimes did not have the emotional support needed to grapple with the serious issues posed by more invasive measures. Families wondered how they could be assured that their loved ones were in the correct locations, when the Army had let them down in the past? The need to rebuild trust between the Army staff and the families calling, was significant.

One person making that call to Arlington National Cemetery was Air Force Colonel William Koch Jr., a retired veteran who called to verify his wife's grave location.

He was initially assured that all was in order and not to be concerned. But Colonel Koch was called a few months later by Cemetery officials who reported that his wife had, in fact, not been interred under the marker he had faithfully visited. Colonel Koch's situation and anguish were documented by reporter Christian Davenport in a story in the Washington Post. TAPS was not involved in Colonel Koch's initial request for information from the Cemetery, but his situation illustrates the complex challenges the new leadership team are facing in assuring families, given the records they inherited.

In handling these inquiries, the staff at Arlington National Cemetery and the survivors they were attempting to respond to would have greatly benefited from the input of a focus group of bereavement professionals accredited by the Association of Death Education and Counseling, mortuary affairs specialists, the National Funeral Directors Association, military bereavement professionals from TAPS, and surviving families.

Had Arlington National Cemetery's situation been treated more like a mass casualty event, such as a plane crash, by the military, things might have fared better for surviving families. The military has considerable expertise in briefing families of those who have died who visit plane crash locations and preparing them for what to expect and see. This expertise, process and knowledge could have genuinely helped the Cemetery's new leadership and its current staff in addressing many of the concerns voiced by relatives of those interred at Arlington National Cemetery.

Families needed clear communication about how to interpret what they were being told by the Cemetery staff as they sought to understand and confirm the burial locations of their loved ones. Had there been a handout on the Cemetery's Web site explaining to the families how to interpret the information they were receiving, and support in helping them think through these complex emotional issues, things might have gone smoother.

Each family must decide on its own, how to approach the unique and unprecedented situation posed by the burial discrepancies at Arlington National Cemetery. It should be recognized that these conversations families are having with staff at Arlington National Cemetery staff are influenced by other factors, including their own emotions, personal feelings about the death, communication within the family, time since the death, funeral experiences of the family, paperwork from the time of the death held by the family, and personal cultural, religious and burial customs.

It is not surprising at all to us at TAPS, who work with bereaved families every day, that at times, communication between the Arlington National Cemetery staff and the families was challenging. Here was a situation guaranteed to stir emotions and grief, for which there was no road map. What is so surprising about the Cemetery's interaction with families on this issue to me, is that more people have not come forward who are upset—given the emotional nature of the conversations this situation required.

In the immediate days after the Inspector General's report was released, there was panic among some families. One family called TAPS with great concern, worried that their loved one was missing completely, because his gravesite at Arlington National Cemetery was not recorded in the VA Grave Locator database online.

The family told TAPS: "I hope that you can help me. I searched the national registry (gravelocator.cem.va.gov) and discovered there is no record of my father. He is buried in Section 59. When my sister called ANC to find out about this, she was told that it was highly unlikely that our father was involved in the mix up. This is not reassuring considering the national registry does not find any record of him. No information was taken in order to pursue this further. Please help and advise us what steps to take next."

After some calls and communication with Cemetery staff on behalf of the family, I found out that not all gravesites at Arlington National Cemetery are listed in the VA's grave locator system, even though this database includes a section for gravesites at Arlington National Cemetery. This information helped assure the family that their loved one had not been completely lost.

But the family's interaction with Cemetery staff was troubling, as they seemed unable to be assured and said no information from them had been recorded, nor had they received additional information from the Cemetery. It took an intervention by TAPS on their behalf to provide essentially basic information to reassure this worried family.

The confusion among families was so significant that TAPS staff were even asked if the discrepancies at Arlington National Cemetery might be replicable to veteran's cemeteries in other States that are administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs' National Cemetery Administration (NCA). We replied that the report applied to only Arlington National Cemetery.

As recently as 2 months ago, TAPS was contacted by a veteran having trouble interpreting the information Arlington National Cemetery staff gave him when he called trying to verify his wife's burial location. He called TAPS for help and sought confirmation from the Cemetery that he would truly be buried with his deceased wife after his own death at some time in the future. After calling the Cemetery, he was left feeling as though his quest for assurance could not be entirely fulfilled.

The veteran told me, "Although my fears are not completely dissolved by Arlington's assurances, I know that certainty can only be achieved by disinterment and DNA testing, and I am not prepared for such an invasive solution. I will just have to live with the uncertainty that Arlington mismanagement has created and hope that the new managers will see that my late wife and I are interred together." That's a truly sad statement.

But given the significant emotional barriers posed by disinterment for grieving families, it's also not surprising. While some in Congress and the media have repeatedly questioned why Arlington National Cemetery has not deployed backhoes and taken more invasive measures to address burial discrepancies, this case illustrates exactly why families are a deeply-enmeshed, necessary, and complicated piece of the puzzle in resolving burial discrepancies at Arlington National Cemetery.

In some cases, families simply cannot authorize more invasive measures emotionally or personally. Yet the condition of the records the new leadership inherited, leave families few other non-invasive options for confirming burial location, other than trust and hope. Under Federal regulations (§ 553.19), it's the right of families to decide what happens to their loved ones, as they are currently interred, at Arlington National Cemetery. It is a complicated legal and emotional matter that cannot be easily or quickly resolved.

Placing trained bereavement counselors, compassionate mortuary professionals or skilled social workers alongside cemetery staff as they talk with concerned families grappling with concerns about the burial locations of their loved ones would give concerned survivors additional support when they call the Cemetery. Involving therapists and licensed counselors with training in bereavement to talk with surviving families would have made these conversations easier for the families, and likely also easier for the Army staff involved.

At times over the last year, I felt it was challenging to convince the Army that being more forward-thinking in its communications approach would benefit both the families and the Army.

As a public relations professional with nearly two decades of experience in communications, I felt it was critical for the Army to talk about the situation at Arlington National Cemetery and the steps being taken by the Army to address it. The implementation of an effective communications plan with clear objectives for communicating with the public and surviving families of those interred at Arlington National Cemetery as soon as the Inspector General's report was released would have tremendously improved the situation.

Because we work on a daily basis with surviving families of our fallen military, as a representative of TAPS, I undertook a pro-active effort to reach out to the new leadership at Arlington National Cemetery as soon as it was in place. This was consistent with our previous practice, as TAPS has assisted families with gravesite issues, headstone corrections, or concerns about policies at the Cemetery over the years. Due to the nature of our work, TAPS is also part of several events at the Cemetery each year held by and for surviving families.

A meeting was held between TAPS staff and Kathryn Condon, the newly appointed executive director of the Army Cemeteries Program. During this meeting, we proposed hosting a town hall meeting where Ms. Condon and other Cemetery staff could meet with surviving families in an informal and private environment for open discussion and engagement.

The town hall event was held in late October 2010 and facilitated by TAPS. It was attended by a number of military survivors, some of whom had traveled from great distances to participate. Families were also able to send in questions via e-mail that were asked at the meeting. Ms. Condon and Mr. Hallinan, the newly-named superintendent, attended the town hall session and spoke directly with surviving families. It was a very productive discussion and TAPS would like to see the Cemetery staff take more proactive measures to communicate with surviving families directly.

Concerns with dis-interments and re-interments at Arlington National Cemetery.

In our experience, the times the new leadership and cemetery staff have struggled, have not been with day-to-day operations or the daily funerals at the Cemetery. Rather, the times the new leadership have struggled to relate to or commu-

nicate with families, has been when dealing with families stressed about the interment locations of their loved ones due to the previous leadership's mis-management, or families who were coming to Arlington National Cemetery for procedures out of the normal realm of daily operations for the cemetery staff, such as dis-interments and re-interments.

TAPS staff provided emotional support to two families who pursued dis-interments of their loved ones at Arlington National Cemetery due to suspected burial discrepancies. I was involved personally in both cases. In both situations, the decisions involved for the surviving family members were difficult and emotional.

Since its founding, TAPS has supported military families making decisions about the dis-interment and re-interment of remains, so we have experience in this area. In some of these past cases, the families were deciding whether to lay to rest additional remains that were recovered after a funeral, or were contemplating moving a loved one's remains to a different cemetery.

Many families have told us that disturbing a gravesite, moving remains, or questioning the location of remains, has complicated their grief journeys. Decisions about disturbing a gravesite are deeply personal, involve a family's culture and burial customs, and are fraught with emotion and difficulty.

The surviving families of our fallen military and veterans deserve our support in working through these issues. While the staff and leadership currently at Arlington National Cemetery are aware of the significant emotional and personal issues involved in dis-interments, the news media and political leadership do not seem to fully understand or note these concerns, and some have speculated as to why there have been so few disinterments to-date. The simple answer is this that dis-interments are fraught with difficulty and emotion. Not every family is able or willing to take such an invasive step to confirm the location of a deceased loved one. Legally, disinterments remain the choice of the surviving family and the primary next of kin of the deceased servicemember.

In the first dis-interment case that TAPS staff was involved with, the family's fear that their loved one was not located under the marked headstone was correct. Additional gravesites were disturbed to locate their loved one's remains. Other burial discrepancies were found and other families were deeply hurt and upset, including retired Air Force Colonel Koch, whom I referenced earlier.

In the second case, TAPS staff were present at a dis-interment to support the Warner family. The family was relieved to find that their loved one, a Marine who died in combat in Iraq at age 19, was buried in the marked location. While our staff questioned at the time the conduct of the Cemetery's staff in how the dis-interment for the Warner family was handled, it is our hope that the Cemetery leadership learned from these experiences and have modified their protocols and procedures for the future.

In a third situation, TAPS staff arrived at Arlington National Cemetery to support a family re-interring their son who had been killed in action in Iraq while serving with the Marine Corps. The family had discovered years after they buried him in another State, that he had desired to be placed at Arlington National Cemetery. When the family arrived at the designated ceremony time at Arlington National Cemetery, the gravesite was not dug and the service delayed for 45 minutes while the Cemetery staff got things in order. I was not personally present at this situation, but did hear about it from TAPS staff who were there. I was told that the Marine Corps funeral director, who was on-site at the Cemetery, had to take charge of this troubling situation and insist a grave be dug. It should be noted that another re-interment that TAPS staff attended to support another family in a similar situation, went smoothly.

In two of these situations, TAPS staff notified the Marine Corps about the dis-interment and re-interment events scheduled to happen at Arlington National Cemetery, prior to their occurrence. In both cases, TAPS was surprised to learn that the Marine Corps funeral director was not being kept apprised by Cemetery staff of these impending events and had not been notified of these events for fallen Marines. We found this to be concerning, as we know families very much appreciate the support of a loved one's service branch when going through something as difficult as a dis-interment or re-interment.

II. Opinion on the future of Arlington National Cemetery

Arlington National Cemetery is a treasured shrine to our fallen military servicemembers and veterans and honors all who take the oath to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States. Arlington National Cemetery carries deep historical significance and meaning to the surviving families of those interred there and the American people as a Nation.

The valor that rests at Arlington National Cemetery and at the gravesites of thousands of military servicemembers and veterans across our country, is what makes their burial grounds a place of respect and honor for all Americans.

It should be noted that the recent tribulations about Arlington National Cemetery's management, are only a few years within a long and proud history. I believe it will take the response of a community, to rectify the problems identified at Arlington National Cemetery, and it may take as long as 3 years, to truly address all of the very serious issues identified in the Inspector General's report.

As an independent nonprofit Veterans Service Organization that supports the families of our fallen military in the immediate days and years following the deaths of their loved ones, TAPS knows how important it is to families that fallen servicemembers be laid to rest with honor and dignity.

We recognize that many within Congress and other areas are calling for a transfer of Arlington National Cemetery to the VA. Surviving families placing their loved ones at VA cemeteries have a universally high satisfaction rate in our experience. Their positive experiences are borne out by the VA National Cemetery Administration's high positive rankings with the American Customer Satisfaction Index.¹ TAPS is grateful that Arlington National Cemetery employees are benefiting from training provided by the VA and that a new superintendent and a new deputy superintendent for Arlington National Cemetery were recruited from within the VA system.

TAPS would not oppose the transfer of Arlington National Cemetery to the VA, because of the high ratings surviving families have consistently given the VA's management of its cemeteries. At the same time, TAPS is also happy to continue partnering with the Army leadership and the leadership team in place at Arlington National Cemetery today to facilitate support of families and provide valuable insight from bereavement professionals. TAPS would seek to work cooperatively with any agency managing Arlington National Cemetery.

It should be noted that there is not a consistent opinion among surviving families on the issue of whether Arlington National Cemetery should be transferred to the Department of Veterans Affairs. I know of a few families who support the Army continuing to administer Arlington National Cemetery. One family member attending the town hall meeting facilitated by TAPS for families to meet the new leadership at the Cemetery, felt very strongly that the Army should retain control of the Cemetery.

Frankly, most surviving families are more concerned about the quality of care provided for their loved ones and their families, rather than which agency is listed as managing a Cemetery.

III. Recommendations for improvements in the Cemetery's operations.

I offer the following recommendations for improvements in the Cemetery's operations:

- I. **Continue to pursue all legal means allowable to render a full accounting of the burial locations at Arlington National Cemetery.** The current administrative leadership staff have outlined a plan to examine burial discrepancies at the cemetery on a sliding scale of concern that escalates action steps and only pursues invasive measures with the involvement and consent of the family of the deceased. While some have suggested that more invasive measures, such as dis-interment and DNA testing of remains, should be undertaken more frequently, it should be recognized that there are significant legal and personal issues with such actions. Any invasive efforts must be approved by the primary next-of-kin of the deceased and all living immediate family members, per Federal regulation (§ 553.19).
- II. **Write and promulgate new administrative rules for the Code of Federal Regulations that rectify the problems with Arlington National Cemetery's policy and management oversight.** Appoint a committee within the Army to draft these rules and submit them to the Secretary of the Army and the Department of Defense for commentary. Allow a public comment period of at least 60 days and in compliance with the Administrative Procedure Act.
- III. **Involve a focus group of bereavement professionals accredited by the Association of Death Education and Counseling, TAPS professionals in military bereavement, the National Funeral Directors As-**

¹ VA's National Cemeteries Lead Nation in Satisfaction Survey, VA News Release, January 25, 2011, Retrieved from <http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2036> adequate emotional and psychological support for surviving families.

sociation, and surviving families in discussing the procedures being taken to correct burial discrepancies at Arlington National Cemetery. Involve this group in reviewing protocols for talking with survivors about burial discrepancies and in communicating about what the Cemetery is doing to resolve them and improve management. Involve this group in discussions about the cemetery's protocols for dis-interments to ensure that every effort is made to provide

- IV. **Involve trained bereavement counselors and social workers alongside Cemetery staff in talking with surviving families who are grappling with issues related to the burial locations of their loved ones.** Consult with TAPS and other organizations, such as the Association of Death Education and Counseling (ADEC) or the VA's Vet Centers (which provide bereavement counseling to surviving families) to provide therapists and licensed counselors with training in bereavement to talk with surviving families who are concerned about the burial location of their loved one.
- V. **Set up an advisory group comprised of Veterans Service Organizations to provide input to the Cemetery administrative staff and offer feedback.** A similar group is in place within the National Cemetery Administration managed by the VA. This group provides input and valuable dialogue between Cemetery administrators and these organizations that touch veterans, survivors and their families.
- VI. **Communicate more fully with surviving families and the public about the steps being taken to correct burial discrepancies at Arlington National Cemetery.** Create a comprehensive communications plan for Arlington National Cemetery. Create a page on the Arlington National Cemetery Web site that explains the steps being taken by the administrative leadership to correct these problems. Publish a fact sheet for surviving families on what is being done to rectify burial discrepancies and management changes. Explain in detail how the burial and interment records are being researched and compared, and offer guidance to help families working through these issues. Include links to videos, news stories and other information.
- VII. **Hold town hall meetings in cooperation with TAPS for surviving families of those interred at Arlington National Cemetery.** Involve Cemetery leadership and staff in sharing information on a regular basis with the community of survivors and veterans in these private sessions where families can ask frank questions and learn about the changes at the Cemetery. TAPS is able to assist with facilitation if needed.
- VIII. **Improve the cooperation and relationships among the military service branches that operate and render honors at Arlington National Cemetery.** Strive to emulate the atmosphere found at Dover Air Force Base, where all of the service branches participate in dignified transfers for our fallen military and work cooperatively.
- IX. **As recommended in the Inspector General's report, update the floral policy for Arlington National Cemetery.** This update should make the policy consistent with current grieving practices, and take into consideration the safety and security of those visiting and working at the cemetery. Include the word "mementos" in the floral policy and describe clearly how often gravesites will be cleaned. The policy should also specify which items will be retained for historical archive purposes by the Army's Center for Military History. Locate appropriate funding for the Army Center for Military History's pilot program to collect significant mementoes left at gravesites in Arlington National Cemetery. They are an important part of our Nation's history and legacy.

It will take a response by a community—comprised of surviving families, Veterans Service Organizations, bereavement professionals at TAPS, Army staff and leadership, the National Funeral Directors Association, mortuary affairs specialists, the Association of Death Education and Counseling, and others to deal with the significant burial discrepancies and problems identified at Arlington National Cemetery by the Army Inspector General.

We cannot go back and undo decades of poor record-keeping and mis-management. We must find a way forward that supports surviving families left behind by our military and veterans.

Personally, I would like to see Congress and others, separate their anger over what happened with the previous leadership of Arlington National Cemetery, from the efforts being taken by the new leadership to address the Inspector General's report. I think the new leadership needs to be held accountable for its actions and

how it treats and communicates with surviving families, but I fear that anger over the non-punishment of the previous officials, has adulterated public dialogue and discussion about Arlington National Cemetery, and become a stumbling block to helping all of us move forward.

Together, we can find the way forward as a community and provide better and more compassionate and comprehensive support to surviving families as they face the serious issues raised by burial discrepancies.

The stakeholders involved in the rectifying the burial mistakes at Arlington National Cemetery include not just the Army, but also veteran's service organizations like TAPS, mortuary affairs professionals from within the military and the professional funeral services community, bereavement professionals, funeral representatives from the service branches, and the surviving families of our fallen military and deceased veterans.

By working together, we can build a new chapter in Arlington National Cemetery's legacy as a national shrine that honors all who have served and died for their country.

Thank you.

**Prepared Statement of Vivianne Cisneros Wersel, Au.D., Chair,
Government Relations Committee, Gold Star Wives of America, Inc.**

"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."

. . . *President Abraham Lincoln, Second Inaugural Address, March 4, 1865*

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, I am pleased to provide testimony on behalf of the Gold Star Wives of America, Inc. (GSW) on issues at Arlington National Cemetery (ANC) that are important to our Nation's military widows and widowers. Our intent is to inform this Committee of the experiences of our members and to help improve the ceremony for others. My name is Dr. Vivianne Wersel, and I am the Chair of the Gold Star Wives' Government Relations Committee. I am the widow of Lieutenant Colonel Richard Wersel, Jr., USMC, who died suddenly on February 4, 2005, 1 week after returning from his second tour of duty in Iraq. My husband was interred in ANC on February 23, 2005.

GSW is an all-volunteer Veterans Service Organization founded in 1945 and Congressionally Chartered in 1980. It is an organization of surviving spouses of military servicemembers who died while on active duty or as the result of a service-connected cause. Our current members are surviving spouses of military servicemembers who served during World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, the conflicts in both Iraq and Afghanistan, and every period in between.

Our primary mission is to support GSW members after the death of their spouse and provide a place to connect with other military surviving spouses. We also provide information about military and veterans' benefits and assist surviving spouses who are experiencing difficulties accessing those benefits. We strive to raise the awareness of Congress, the public, and the military community to the many inequities existing in survivor programs and benefits.

The deceased spouses of many of GSW members are interred in ANC. Many of our members relocated to the Arlington area just to be near where their loved one is buried. It is important for some of us to visit our loved ones and bond with other families in similar circumstances.

Prior to the recent change in administration, some of our members endured unfortunate experiences with the interment process such as the waiting time for interment, paperwork for the headstone, a lack of information about the protocol of the ceremony. Many of these experiences occurred when they were wading through their grief and unfortunately, disrupted the integrity of the ceremony. In preparation for this testimony, information was gathered from interments that occurred between 2005 and the present.

We consistently hear from our members that the wait for burial can be a most difficult period while in their fog of grief. GSW seeks to raise awareness to the Committee as well as ANC in the hopes the situation can be improved with the wait time and issues with storage. One GSW member, Nikole, lost her husband on February 24, 2011. He was an active duty JAG officer in the U.S. Army. His civilian funeral was the week following his death; however, he could not be buried at ANC before June due to the "wait" time. He is being buried this very day as we sit in

this hearing, one day shy of 4 full months from his death. In addition to the wait, the widow has been asked for a \$125 per week fee for storage of her husband's body. The Army will pay for the service; however, not until the body has been buried. Therefore, in the meantime, the funeral home is requesting payment from the widow. This widow was also put in the untenable position of sorting through a disagreement between the Ft. Belvoir Casualty Affairs Office and the funeral home about who was responsible to supply the casket, each pointing to the other. She ended up running short on time and getting a casket that was basically a "scratch and dent" discontinued model from the warehouse. She could have buried him sooner and avoided the storage fees if she had him buried without honors, but he served his country well and deserves the honors. Waiting for the burial of a loved one is very emotional as interment is the final goodbye. There are three key players/organizations involved in a burial at Arlington: ANC itself, the Casualty/Mortuary Affairs Offices for each of the services and the funeral home. It is logical for Arlington to take the lead and provide the appropriate information to everyone involved, including the surviving family.

Typically, for active duty deaths, burial is within a reasonable amount of time; however, some families of servicemembers who are eligible for burial at ANC sometimes have to wait for months for their interment. This is emotionally draining as well as a time of financial burden.

In the U S Army Inspector General Report completed in February 2010 and amended in November 2010, the average wait time for interring/inurning of servicemembers killed in action was 10-14 days; the average wait for veterans was 4-6 weeks. GSW is concerned that the wait time for veterans, even those who die on active duty, is now 4 months or more.

The majority of GSW issues pertained to the paperwork for the headstone that is presented to the family at the time of the interment. As you can imagine, that is a particularly difficult time for families to be asked to complete the paperwork. Most are merely questioned if the information presented is accurate and are not informed of options for additional information that can be inscribed such as "Loving Husband and Father." The information provided is not always consistent and in some cases is non-existent. GSW seeks improvement of this process.

Lisa, another GSW, stated that when she arrived at the Administration Center prior to her husband's service, she was escorted to the desk where she was asked to select a design for her husband's headstone. The Arlington representative escorting her told her she had to hurry because she did not have much time. She needed to correct the date of death on the paperwork and then as she was trying to select from the hundreds of spiritual symbols, the representative sternly reminded her to hurry or they would miss the scheduled flyover. If time was so critical, perhaps they should have waited to complete the paperwork until the service was finished. Information must be provided to the families at the right time so decisions can be made outside of the emotion of the day of interment.

After the ceremony, some families felt they were not given enough time at the graveside. Some were not allowed to stay through the lowering of the casket into the grave. There were some concerns about why non-Iraq/Afghanistan servicemembers (or spouses) were placed in Section 60 and some Iraq/Afghanistan servicemembers were not given the option of being buried in Section 60 and were placed in other sections.

In October 2010, Ms. Kathryn Condon, the new Executive Director of the Army National Cemeteries Program, held a town hall meeting to listen to survivor issues and concerns. Taking the time to meet with individuals and listening to their concerns was an important first step in communication with Gold Star Families. Ms. Condon was truly involved in the discussions and did her best to answer questions. With the exception of the "wait" time for the interment, Ms. Condon addressed the issues brought before her. Ms. Condon also presented a brochure that was being prepared for the families to help alleviate the problems with communication. It was in the final stages waiting for policy approval. Ms. Condon's brochure addressing pertinent information regarding a burial at Arlington is vital in this communications process.

There has been confusion with misplaced deceased servicemembers, a lack of communication when policy changes, problems with lithochrome headstones and headstone scripture, etc. Ms. Condon did her best to address all of these concerns. This was very cathartic for all who attended.

Recommendations:

GSW seeks a status update from the ANC town hall meeting recommendations to ANC:

- Approval of ANC brochure, to include protocol and policy

- Establish e-mail list to notify survivors of events and changes to protocol, rules and policy
- Implement working group of stakeholders to identify issues be established to address the concerns of family members
- Host town hall meetings periodically so that stakeholders may raise their concerns in an open forum

GSW seeks decreasing the wait time for interment. The waiting time for interment and the costs involved in storing the body for long periods also need to be addressed.

We are pleased to have Ms. Condon and the Army as the gatekeepers to our loved ones garden as well as our future resting place. GSW recommendations are suggested to help improve the quality of the service of the interment at ANC, to inspire trust and exceed the stakeholders' expectations and to increase the understanding of the stakeholders' needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony. I am available for any questions you may have.

Statement of Ian de Planque, Deputy Director, National Legislative Commission, The American Legion

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Without question, the failures of past leadership at Arlington National Cemetery are inexcusable. The hallowed ground, a little over 600 acres of northern Virginia hillside, has stood since this Nation's Civil War as the crown jewel of reverence for the fallen warriors, the men and women who have served this Nation in peacetime and war in the air, on land and at sea. Arlington National Cemetery is the epicenter of a country's reverence for these servicemembers. This is the sacred ground of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldiers, and John F. Kennedy's Eternal Flame. Yet past management of these grounds led to a state of disorder, disrepair and disrespect that was clearly disgraceful. There is very little to be served by reciting a litany of the past failures. Rather it is far more important to acknowledge the intervening successes and recognize the remaining challenges.

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

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

The news coming from the cemetery was seldom good, and often horrifying, but it was also honest. America learned of mislabeled remains, and bodies buried in the wrong locations. This was not some trivial matter thought to have occurred once or twice, but perhaps in 6,000 locations or more. Cemetery staff, when questioned by incoming management regarding standard procedure manuals for burials and plot alignment, admitted no such written records existed, and work had been handed down by word of mouth. Electronic records did not exist, information was stored on index cards as if the Nation's most prominent military cemetery was a 1950's muller shop. Perhaps the only thing more eye-opening than the litany of prior failings at the cemetery was the willingness of new management to dig deep enough to find all of the errors and begin plans to set them aright.

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

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

Now that the Department of Defense (DoD) has had time to regain its footing and begin to remove the stain of the failures at Arlington from its image, The American Legion urges Congress to place the ultimate ongoing responsibility of managing, operating, and maintaining Arlington National Cemetery and the U.S. Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemetery in Washington, DC directly with the Department

of Veterans Affairs through the National Cemetery Administration (NCA). In the entire government, no other agency can match the track record of success and satisfaction NCA has worked hard to achieve. NCA is well known for their attention to detail, and their ability to perform the task of ensuring the dignity of or fallen servicemembers like no other.

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

The DoD has one critical mission, to prepare for and execute the war fighting necessary for this Nation’s defense. Sidelining resources of money and staff to non-war fighting tasks degrades efficiency within DoD. NCA is already managing 131 cemeteries and doing it well. As any business would point out, management costs can be better amortized when spread over a large operation in this nature, and the costs to absorb Arlington and the U.S. Soldier’s and Airmen’s Home National Cemeteries would result in net cost saving for the government as a whole.

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

What transpired at Arlington National Cemetery was unconscionable. The past is immutable and cannot be changed. All that may change is how we face the future. To this end, as we begin to move past the immediacy of crisis and into long range planning, The American Legion again stresses the importance of ensuring future operations are smooth, professional and worthy of the gravity afforded to the task of granting our servicemembers rest with reverence and dignity. While the efforts of Director Condon and Superintendent Hallinan are laudable, they do not represent a long term solution, nor should that be asked of them. The American Legion asks Congress to begin the transitional process of transferring management authority for Arlington National Cemetery and the U.S. Soldier’s and Airmen’s Home National Cemetery to the National Cemetery Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

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

Statement of Hon. John Barrow, a Representative in Congress from the State of Georgia

The many brave men and women buried at Arlington National Cemetery dedicated their lives to serving our country. They’ve earned our undying gratitude and respect, and it’s our responsibility to ensure that they continue to receive that respect after they have passed on.

I had the honor of recently visiting Arlington National Cemetery, where Ms. Condon and Mr. Hallinan showed me firsthand the improvements they have made in maintaining and operating the final resting place for our veterans and their families.

Two things are certain: the problems at Arlington didn’t develop overnight, and the problems won’t be fixed overnight. The problems resulted from years of poor management and a lack of Congressional oversight. We have a responsibility to fix those mistakes and ensure they never happen again.

I look forward to learning more about how the operations at Arlington have been improved, but I am more interested in ensuring that these mistakes are never repeated.

Our deceased servicemembers and their families deserve the respect of a well operated and well maintained final resting place.

