

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)
REPOSE TO THE
APRIL 27-28, 2006
RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CEMETERIES AND MEMORIALS**

Recommendation 1: The Committee urges the Secretary to allocate such funds as necessary to print local cemetery brochures for the 10 national cemeteries with the greatest rate of interments.

VA Response: The Department appreciates the Committee's support for this initiative. The cemetery brochures will help the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) in its outreach to veterans and their family members. Funding for this initiative is considered within NCA's budget execution and review process. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2006, funding is provided to produce approximately 400,000 brochures for 32 cemeteries. The brochures are printed on a priority basis, first for active cemeteries based on their interment workload, and then for closed cemeteries.

Recommendation 2: The Committee endorses continued evaluation and efforts to study burial benefits including service area and population threshold.

VA Response: A joint effort is underway to conduct a comprehensive program evaluation of the full array of burial benefits and services that VA provides. The program evaluation conducted by NCA, in partnership with the Veterans Benefits Administration and the Office of Policy, Planning, and Preparedness, will assess, develop, and update program outcomes, goals, and objectives, and compare actual program results with established goals. It is anticipated that the study to be completed in FY 2008.

Recommendation 3: The Committee recommends demographic study information as was presented at this meeting by Lynn Howell be made available to the committee at each meeting.

VA Response: NCA will provide current and projected veteran demographic data to the Committee at each meeting.

Recommendation 4: The Committee endorses and supports the position of the Secretary on the Statement of Administration Policy related to bills HR 5037 and S2452.

VA Response: HR 5037, *Respect for America's Fallen Heroes Act*, and S 2452, the Senate companion bill, would prohibit unauthorized demonstrations at VA national cemeteries or Arlington National Cemetery. On April 6, 2006, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs William F. Tuerk testified in support of HR 5037

before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Disability and Memorial Affairs. In his testimony, he stated, "NCA fully supports the intentions and purposes of this bill... VA's current regulations already prohibit any demonstration, which includes oration and display of placards or flags within the grounds of a VA national cemetery, and the distribution of handbills or display of placards on cemetery grounds, except as authorized by the head of the facility." VA continues to work closely with Congress to preserve the decorum and sanctity of our national cemeteries.

Recommendation 5: The Committee commends General Stan Brown for hosting this meeting and giving the Committee the opportunity to witness and evaluate the educational opportunities and new concepts being implemented at Riverside National Cemetery. The Committee recommends that VA and NCA explore the expansion of these innovations in the future.

VA Response: The development of Riverside National Cemetery, fueled in significant part by the creative energy of General Stan Brown, is a model for new memorial construction, strategic planning for memorial design, procurement and placement, and out-of-the-box thinking on ways to bring the public into VA's national cemeteries. The achievements have applicability to other national cemeteries, particularly the new and larger cemeteries being added as a part of NCA's current historic expansion. NCA will benefit from those lessons learned and will continue to foster dialogue, such as the communication between General Brown and fellow Committee member Joe Martory, who will see three new cemeteries open in his home State of Florida within the next few years. This will encourage consideration of memorial development in these cemeteries. The Department sees this matter as a validation of the value the Committee brings to VA's National Cemetery system.



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

September 27, 2006



Commemorating 75 Years of Service

Mr. Jerry L. Laws
Chairman
Advisory Committee on Cemeteries
and Memorials
12601 Baylor Peak Road
Las Cruces, NM 88011

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for the recommendations from the Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials' April 2006 meeting held in Riverside, California. I appreciate the work that the Committee has done to assist the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) regarding its memorial programs.

Enclosed is VA's response to the Committee's recommendations.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. James Nicholson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

R. James Nicholson

Enclosure