

ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

News Release

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Progress continues at Arlington National Cemetery

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Executive Director of the Army National Cemeteries Program testified today before the Senate Subcommittee on Contracting Oversight, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, along with the Department of the Army Inspector General, and the Government Accountability Office Director of Defense Capabilities and Management and Director of Acquisition and Sourcing Management regarding the progress that has been made at Arlington National Cemetery, as well as findings from requirements of Public Law 111-339.

The testimony is a follow up from the July 2010 hearing, which the Army Inspector General (DAIG) reported the results of the June 2010 inspection that identified deficiencies from previous management practices at the cemetery. Since then, the DAIG completed a follow-up inspection in September 2011 that reported “significant progress has been made in all aspects of the Cemetery’s performance, accountability and modernization.”

In accordance with PL 111-339, the Secretary of the Army John McHugh released to Congress the results of a year-long effort to ensure accountability of gravesites and records at Arlington National Cemetery. The Gravesite Accountability effort resulted in the first-ever review, analysis and coordination of all Arlington records that included more than 147 years of varying records. The end result will be a single database that will serve as the authoritative record at Arlington National Cemetery.

The Government Accountability Office – also directed to submit reports in accordance with PL 111-339 – similarly noted that the Army “has taken positive steps to address management deficiencies at Arlington and has implemented improvements across a range of areas.”

Kathryn A. Condon, executive director, Army National Cemeteries Program, testified to the subcommittee regarding the standards and corrective actions that she and Patrick K. Hallinan, cemetery superintendent, instituted to address deficiencies.

“Arlington has made monumental changes the last 19 months and we continue to move forward each and every day, capturing our progress with repeatable processes with predictable results,” said Condon.

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Some of the actions taken by Arlington leadership include:

- Completing a review and accounting of all gravesites and inurnment niches at Arlington National Cemetery;
- Creating defined accountability processes that is integrated into Arlington's daily operations;
- Transitioning the paper-based records keeping system to web-based systems that includes digital copies of all of the older paper records;
- Establishing a rigorous training program for employees;
- Validating Arlington's contract requirements and re-competing all contracts;
- Creating an integrated call center to improve communication with the public and assist families and funeral homes to schedule funeral services; and
- Publishing the Army National Cemeteries Program Campaign Plan, which brings together in one strategic document the priorities, measurable standards and expected milestones to achieve the long term vision of Arlington and the Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemeteries.

“Significant progress has been made,” said Condon. “Our contracting practices now bring the cemetery in compliance with Federal Acquisition Regulations; and the implementation of state-of-the-art technology now makes the hallowed grounds at Arlington one of the most technologically advanced cemeteries in the country.”

Arlington National Cemetery has several technology-related tools under development. The Army is currently testing an application that will enable the public to locate gravesites in the cemetery, acquire directions to the gravesite, and view grave markers on their smart phones, or through the cemetery's website either at home or using the on-site kiosks. Arlington's new website is also the platform for the new “Headstone Formatting” application that is currently being evaluated for release. This technology will enable families with Internet access to design their loved one's headstone or niche cover on-line for approval prior to the burial service, reducing the time spent on administrative matters the day of the service.

Among the national cemeteries in the United States, Arlington National Cemetery is unique. It is the only national cemetery that routinely holds graveside services and provides full military honors for eligible veterans. It is a national military shrine, hosting 4 million visitors annually, as well as ceremonial functions involving foreign heads of state and other dignitaries. As the second largest cemetery in the country, Arlington National Cemetery oversees approximately 27-30 funeral services per day, five days a week. To better serve the needs of families, Arlington recently began supporting services on Saturdays for which military honors are not required or requested.

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