

**DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY**

**COMPLETE STATEMENT**

**OF**

**JOHN C. METZLER**

**SUPERINTENDENT**

**ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY**

**BEFORE**

**THE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**ON**

**PROPOSED CHANGES IN BURIAL ELIGIBILITY**

MR. CHAIRMAN AND DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE:

## **INTRODUCTION**

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before this committee to discuss proposed legislation regarding eligibility criteria for burial at Arlington National Cemetery. The Secretary of the Army is responsible for burial policy at Arlington National Cemetery. I am here to provide the Army's comments on the proposed legislation and answer any questions you may have.

Arlington National Cemetery is America's most prominent National Cemetery and serves as a shrine honoring the men and women who have served in the Armed Forces. It is a visible reflection of America's appreciation for those individuals whose acts and accomplishments reflect the highest service to the country.

## **FUNERALS**

In Fiscal Year 2001, there were 3,727 interments and 2,212 inurnments. In Fiscal Year 2002, we estimate there will be 3,800 interments and 2,500 inurnments. Looking ahead to Fiscal Year 2003, we estimate there will be 3,925 interments and 2,700 inurnments.

## **CEREMONIES AND VISITATION**

Thousands of visitors visit Arlington National Cemetery to participate in ceremonial events and pay their respects to our fallen heroes. During Fiscal Year 2001, about 3,000 ceremonies were conducted at this treasured National Cemetery. The President of the United States attended ceremonies we conducted commemorating Veterans Day and Memorial Day.

## **PROPOSED LEGISLATION**

As you know, the space that we have available in Arlington Cemetery is limited and has required the establishment of rules to regulate burial eligibility. The rules governing burial eligibility in Arlington National Cemetery are set forth in Title 32 of the Code of Federal Regulations. The Army, as the executive agent for the Cemetery, strives to implement these regulations fairly and consistent with the space limitations we face.

The Army is troubled with the proposed legislation contained in H.R. 3423, regarding the extension of burial privileges in Arlington National Cemetery to

certain current and former reserve component members of the Armed Forces and their dependents. The legislation expands eligibility for burial in Arlington National Cemetery beyond that which can be supported by current space constraints and will likely cause the denial of this privilege to other eligible persons.

Under current projections, the group of newly eligible reservists under the proposed legislation would exceed 188,000, not to mention their dependents, whose number I do not know. While the long-term effect of such an expansion is not now known, clearly the number of eligible veterans will be greatly expanded at a time when we are already projecting that Arlington National Cemetery will exhaust its current space by 2025.

The Army leadership was aware that Senators Warner and Stevens had introduced legislation (Section 3135 of H. R. 3338) that narrowly tailors expansion of the eligibility criteria to authorize individual interment in Arlington National Cemetery for those retired members of the Armed Forces reserves, not otherwise eligible, who died in the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks. The Secretary was also sensitive to the fact that any legislative proposal would likely not be enacted in time to accommodate a request for burial on December 12<sup>th</sup> as an exception to the burial policy. Thus, to honor the intent of the proposed legislation and to spare the family any further grief, the Secretary of the Army granted an exception to allow the burial of retired Naval Reserve Captain Charles F. Burlingame, III, in a separate grave in Arlington National Cemetery.

## **CONCLUSION**

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my remarks. I will be pleased to respond to questions from the committee.