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A M V E T S

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STATEMENT OF

CHRISTINA M. ROOF

AMVETS NATIONAL ACTING LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON DISABILITY ASSISTANCE AND
MEMORIAL AFFAIRS**

CONCERNING

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

THURSDAY JUNE 23, 2011

334 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

2:30 PM

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 one 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 Title 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.



Christina M. Roof serves as the National Acting Legislative Director for the national veterans service organization American Veterans (AMVETS) at the organization's national headquarters.

As one of AMVETS' top advocates on Capitol Hill, Ms. Roof is responsible for researching, writing, and presenting testimony to the U.S. House of Representatives on behalf of AMVETS. Ms. Roof is also involved with the development and execution of AMVETS' legislative agenda in the areas of veterans entrepreneurship, appropriations, health care, veteran benefits, active duty service member entitlements, and national security, among many other subject matter areas.

Ms. Roof also represents AMVETS to numerous federal agencies including, but not limited to, the Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Defense, Department of Labor, and the Department of Homeland Security. Ms. Roof is also an author and contributor to the Department of Veterans Affairs Independent Budget, which is published annually by the nation's top veterans' service organizations AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and Veterans of Foreign Wars. Ms. Roof's responsibilities also include actively identifying current issues and concerns within the veterans and active duty military communities, and helping to develop and execute plans, both legislatively and through outreach, to promote and institute solutions.

Ms. Roof hails from a family steeped in military tradition and brings a wealth of personal knowledge on veterans' and military issues to AMVETS. She is an active member and committee member in several service and volunteer organizations, including AMVETS Ladies Auxiliary, The Military Coalition, and the Department of Labor's Veteran Entrepreneurship Advisory Committee.

Ms. Roof joined the AMVETS staff after working as a small business and public relations consultant for several years. Ms. Roof holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Military History and Strategy from the College of Charleston in Charleston, South Carolina, as well as many professional and academic certifications.

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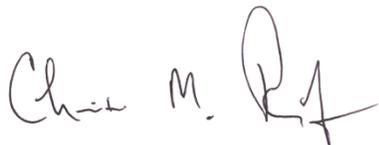
June 15, 2011

The Honorable Representative Runyan, Chairman
Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs
House Veterans Affairs Committee
335 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Runyan:

Neither AMVETS nor I have received any federal grants or contracts, during this year or in the last two years, from any agency or program relevant to the June 23, 2011, Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs hearing on “Arlington National cemetery: An Update on the New Administration.”

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christina M. Roof". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "C" and a stylized "R".

Christina M. Roof
AMVETS
National Acting Legislative Director