

Joint Statement From AMVETS National Advocacy Leadership

Regarding Vandalism Veteran Affairs Facilities, D.C. Memorials, and the State of our Nation



WASHINGTON D.C., June 1, 2020 -

Good afternoon, everyone. This is Sherman Gillums, Chief Advocacy Officer for AMVETS.

I'm sitting right now at the reflecting pool on the day after our country saw sweeping protests across the country. In many cases they turn into riots where people were hurt and property was damaged.

As I sit next to the reflecting pool it's appropriate because it's probably a good time for us to reflect as a nation on what's been happening, not just what got us here or what are we doing all about it, and how this is going to help or hurt in the future as we work through what I consider an identity crisis for this country.

Straight ahead of me is the Lincoln Memorial. Lincoln is the president who is credited with pushing the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed enslaved Africans and provided a pathway to citizenship for many of them. That Monument was decimated yesterday.

Behind me, you're looking at the very wall, the World War II Memorial, the men and many cases of women who went and fought for the freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. To have that desecrated it's as if we're desecrating ourselves as a nation. We have that freedom to protest and assemble peacefully, and in many ways this is not as peaceful as was intended by the Constitution. I don't think you endear others to your cause when you go too far with the idea of protests and people's lives are changed forever.

I myself as a black American want to see changes in this country. I've seen what discrimination and segregation and all of those things can do to entire families and communities. At the same time those people are serving in combat. They're serving in war right now. All these icons of that service of that service, this is as much of a disservice to them as well as everyone else in this country. AMVETS is disappointed in a lot of what we saw in D.C., to include the graffiti that was sprayed on the VA central Office building.

I hope there are limits. I hope we're not to a point where we can expect to see graffiti on

Veterans serving veterans for more than 75 years.

gravestones at Arlington National Cemetery at gravesites around the country where veterans reach their final resting place.

There should be no limit to how much change we call for, but there should be limits into how far we go to provoke that change because it could have the opposite effect.

We want to support any American's rights to protest, but we don't want the protest to become the very thing we're fighting, which is anarchy, tyranny, and all those things that marginalize communities like Black Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and all others how have to fight for their right to be treated equally.

We can do better than this.

- **Sherman Gillums Jr.**, Chief Advocacy Officer, AMVETS
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Saturday evening I watched as protest consumed the streets of Washington D.C. The World War II memorial, Lincoln memorial, and Veterans Affairs Central Office were vandalized, as well as several surrounding offices and stores caught fire. As a veteran and someone who regularly receives VA care, I feel that it is important to explain why this cannot be seen simply as vandalism to just some unassuming, humdrum government building.

The Veterans Health Administration sees more than nine million veterans annually. With 1,074 outpatient sites and 170 VA Medical Centers, VA serves as the foundation of healthcare when it comes to those who took an oath to defend America and her interests.

Right now, VA serves another set of patients: the American public. In April, VA was called upon to implement it's 'Fourth Mission' and work alongside private and for-profit hospital systems in caring for those affected by the coronavirus. As resources grow thin, medical professionals work endlessly, and outlook on a vaccine unknown, it could be said that right now, VA is caring for those who have borne the battle, the widow, the orphan, and the nation herself.

I worry that the VA Central Office is just the beginning. How long until we see VA Medical Centers and Mobile Vet Centers receive the same treatment as their Headquarters? As a nation scrambling to find healing, it is vital to be mindful of the healers themselves.

AMVETS was born during World War II, and the World War II Memorial has a special meaning for us. For it to be vandalized as if it were nothing is very hurtful and almost unthinkable. Please let your protests be those of words and not violence and vandalism.

Thank you.

- **Jan Brown**, National Commander, AMVETS

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