



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

August 14, 2002

The Honorable Christopher H. Smith
Chairman, Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am pleased to forward to you the report entitled Volume 2: National Shrine Commitment. This is the last of three separate volumes that will complete the *Study on Improvements to Veterans Cemeteries*, from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in response to section 613 of the Veterans Millennium Health Care and Benefits Act, Pub. L. No. 106-117, 113 Stat. 1545, 1581 (1999).

Section 613 of the Act requires VA to contract for an independent study to address the one-time repair needs at each national cemetery maintained by the National Cemetery Administration (NCA); the feasibility of making standards of appearance of active and closed national cemeteries commensurate with standards of appearance at the finest cemeteries in the world; the number of additional national cemeteries required to meet future burial needs of veterans until 2020; the advantages and disadvantages of using flat grave markers and upright headstones in national cemeteries; and the condition of flat grave marker sections in national cemeteries. Logistics Management Institute (LMI) was selected as the independent contractor for this study.

The results of the study required by section 613 have been issued in three separate volumes:

- Volume 1: Future Burial Needs
- Volume 2: National Shrine Commitment
- Volume 3: Cemetery Standards of Appearance

I have enclosed a copy of the cost statement of preparing the section 613 study as required by the Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2000, Pub. L. No. 106-419, § 403(d), 114 Stat. 1822, 1864.

The National Shrine Commitment report provides the first independent, system-wide comprehensive review of the condition of assets at 119 national cemeteries. An assessment was not conducted at the new Ft. Sill National Cemetery in Oklahoma, which opened in November 2001. The study

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requirements directed the contractor to recommend projects that would ensure a dignified and respectful setting appropriate for each cemetery's age, climate, topography, and available burial options. Projects were identified through comprehensive on-site assessments, which included an assessment of the condition of flat grave marker sections, at each national cemetery. Assessments were conducted by teams of building architects, landscape architects, and engineers using a Field Survey Checklist developed in collaboration with NCA that incorporated both VA's and industry's standards for burial sections, landscape features, roads, buildings, etc. Overall, 13 cemetery elements and over 60 specific features were evaluated in each cemetery.

As a result of the site visits and evaluations, the study identifies over 900 projects at a cost of nearly \$280 million. The assessments represent a snapshot at one point in time. Over the past year, some of these projects have received funding and some have been completed. In FY 2001 through FY 2003, a total of \$25 million has been identified for gravesite renovation and repair projects as part of NCA's National Shrine Commitment initiative. This funding, and the work it will accomplish, should be considered against the list of projects identified in the report. In addition, many of the projects are already identified in NCA's 5-Year Facilities Plan.

In very few cases are the repair projects identified in this study "one time" requirements. The care and maintenance of cemetery grounds and facilities is cyclical in nature and requires continuing efforts. This is especially true for the maintenance of burial sections to include cleaning and realignment of headstones and markers. Deferred maintenance has resulted in the need for many of these types of projects as identified in the study. NCA will develop strategies for preventative maintenance to address these and other recurring issues related to the appearance of our national cemeteries.

In planning to complete such a large number of repair projects, VA must also consider budgetary implications. Because the study did not require the contractor to recommend how VA is to fund these projects, it is important that a sound fiscal strategy be developed. I have asked NCA to evaluate the identified projects and develop a strategy based on the following guidelines:

- Prioritize the recommended projects. The contractor has provided an extensive database that includes detailed assessment and cost information. This information will be used to develop a matrix that takes into account:
 - The problem category identified,

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- The condition rating to determine the severity of problems within each problem category,
 - The Facility Condition Assessment Model (F*CAM) results for individual cemeteries, which provides the cost of repairs expressed as a percentage of the Plant Replacement Value (PRV), and
 - Additional data from NCA's annual Survey of Satisfaction with National Cemeteries in order to consider the viewpoint of veterans and their families.
- Evaluate the recommended repair processes. In some cases recommended solutions involve materials and processes that, while achieving the same results, are different from NCA's established methods. NCA will review these alternative methods for cost effectiveness and long-term benefits.
 - Establish a timeline for funding repair projects based on urgency and need. The contractor was not required to provide a timeline for completing all identified projects. However, for illustrative purposes, a 5-year timeline was used in the F*CAM analysis for completing all 900 projects. The feasibility of this will be addressed and alternatives developed.
 - Determine the appropriate funding source for each project. Some projects will require minor construction funds, others may be accomplished using operating funds, and still others may require major construction funds.

The information provided in the National Shrine Commitment report will assist VA in making appropriate and timely funding decisions for repair needs at national cemeteries. As a result, we can ensure that our cemeteries continue to provide the dignified and respectful setting that our veterans deserve.

Additional copies of this report are available from Mr. Charles Likel, Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs, at 202-273-5615.

Sincerely yours,



Anthony J. Principi

Enclosures (2)

**Estimate of Cost to Prepare
Congressionally Mandated Report**

Title of Report: Study on Improvements to Veterans
Cemeteries

Report Required by: Veterans Millennium Health Care and Benefits
Act (Pub. L. No. 106-117, § 613, 113 Stat.
1545, 1581 (1999))

In accordance with section 116 of title 38, United States Code, listed below is a statement of the cost of preparing Study on Improvements to Veterans Cemeteries and a brief explanation of the methodology used in preparing the cost estimate.

Contract Cost	\$2,504,082.00
Staff Cost	\$ 131,760.00
Total Cost	\$2,635,824.00

Contract cost reflects the firm fixed price contract with Logistics Management Institute for the entire section 613 study and includes printing and distribution.

Staff cost is based on 2,160 staff hours at approximately \$61.00 per hour (salary and benefits).