



**THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS
AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON**

March 28, 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 3: Cemetery Standards of Appearance, which is the first of three separate volumes that will comprise the report, *An Independent 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 of national cemeteries 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 of 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 will be issued in three separate volumes:

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

I am also including a copy of a statement of cost of preparing the section 613 study as required by the Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2000.

The scope and objective of the study were developed in consultation with professional staff members of both the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs and with representatives of the major veterans service organizations. The timeline was also closely coordinated with congressional staff to meet their information needs. We continue to work with our contractor to complete Volumes 1 and 2 as

quickly as possible. However, the scope of work required and the complexity of the studies have resulted in a more laborious process than any of us expected. We will forward the studies as quickly as possible, and will continue to keep the interested parties aware of the process.

The Cemetery Standards of Appearance report (Vol. 3) addresses the study requirements mandated by section 613 (b)(1)(B) and (D) of the Veterans Millennium Health Care and Benefits Act relating to the feasibility of establishing standards of appearance for our national cemeteries commensurate with those of the finest cemeteries in the world as well as a comparison of the use of upright headstones and flat grave markers in national cemeteries.

Each national cemetery exists as a national shrine and as such serves as an expression of the appreciation and respect of a grateful Nation for the service and sacrifice of her veterans. Each national shrine provides an enduring memorial to their service as well as a dignified and respectful setting for their final rest.

National cemeteries also carry expectations of appearance that set them apart from their civilian counterparts. The commitment of our Nation, as defined by law, is to create and maintain these sites as national shrines, transcending the provision of benefits to an individual. As national shrines, VA's cemeteries serve a purpose that continues long after burials have ceased and visits of families and loved ones have ended.

A national shrine may be defined as a place of honor and memory that declares to the visitor or family member who views it that within its majestic setting each and every veteran may find a sense of serenity, historic sacrifice and nobility of purpose. Each visitor should depart feeling that the grounds, the gravesites and the environs of the national cemetery are a beautiful and awe-inspiring tribute to those who gave much to preserve our nation's freedom and way of life.

The Cemetery Standards of Appearance study serves as an independent reference guide that will assist VA in ensuring that the overall appearance of each national cemetery rises to the level of a national shrine.

LMI noted that while "overall visual impact distinguishes some cemeteries as 'finest in the world'," they did not find any "single cemetery that qualifies for that distinction on all elements of appearance." LMI also acknowledged that different cemetery systems seek to achieve different outcomes and that none has the same mission as NCA. In the Cemetery Standards of Appearance study, LMI recommends a set of 122 standards for consideration by NCA as criteria by which to judge success.

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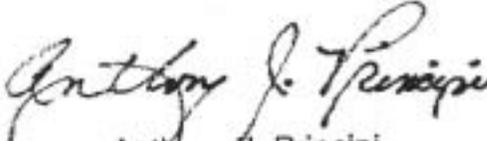
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The report will serve as a planning tool to review and refine our inventory of standards. When complete, the inventory of standards will be published and linked to statements of policy and operational descriptions of process through directives and handbooks.

NCA has already begun the important work of addressing the standards. Directors of NCA's Memorial Service Networks, senior cemetery directors from across the country and architects and engineers from NCA's Office of Construction Management have met and reviewed LMI's recommended list of standards. The panel has compared LMI's list of standards to those already in place in NCA and will recommend appropriate changes to NCA's standards to the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs. Once this is accomplished, all national cemeteries will have a definitive guide for ensuring that each meets the definition of a national shrine. I expect to receive a briefing and a copy of NCA's final Standards of Appearance within the next few months.

Additional copies of this report are available from Mr. Charles Likel in the 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: Vol.3: Cemetery Standards of Appearance
An Independent Study on Improvements to
Veterans' Cemeteries

Report Required by: Veterans Millennium Health Care and Benefits
Act of 1999 (Pub.L. 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 Volume 3: Cemetery Standards of Appearance and a brief explanation of the methodology used in preparing the cost estimate.

Contract Cost	\$2,494,155.00
Staff Cost	\$ 110,410.00
Total Cost	\$2,604,565.00

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 1,810 staff hours at approximately \$61.00 per hour (salary and benefits).