



News From The ...

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

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Subcommittee Takes Next Step Toward Enacting New Legislation for Veterans

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Today, the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs heard testimony considering seven pieces of legislation regarding Arlington National Cemetery, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) claims and appeals process, and the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act (COLA).

“Today, our committee heard testimony on several bills addressing the problems at Arlington National Cemetery, the veterans' claims backlog, and improvements to veterans' benefits. Through HR 1441, we hope to begin to rebuild trust in the administration of Arlington by codifying a 1962 Army prohibition of reservations at the cemetery. This will ensure that all eligible veterans have an equal chance and opportunity to be interred and that no one veteran is given preferential treatment,” stated Representative Jon Runyan (NJ-03), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs.

Ms. Kathryn Condon, executive director of Arlington National Cemetery commended the Subcommittee's efforts to clarify old laws and extended the Department of the Army's gratitude for the support given by the Committee on behalf of the hallowed grounds. She did note, however, that some gravesites might not be suitable for multiple family member burials and requested that the legislation be adjusted accordingly.

Representative Ann Marie Buerkle (NY-25) observed that the COLA legislation before the Subcommittee is extremely relevant in today's austere economic environment. The legislation would provide a cost of living increase to veterans' disability compensation rates. “This is the right thing to do for our veterans. This legislation will help to alleviate some of the financial strain on these families as we experience a significant rise in gas and food prices,” she noted.

Aiming to make the VA claims and appeals process more efficient for veterans, the Veterans Choice in Filing Act, did spark some concern from Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) in attendance.

“We are committed to working with VA and the VSOs to solve this issue. A veteran who depends on benefits cannot wait more than half a year for their claim to be processed. This Committee welcomes ideas on how to solve this moving forward, but the time to act is now,” Runyan said. He also pressed the VA for more public accountability through performance measures at each of the 57 regional offices where claims are filed.

The Subcommittee plans further hearings on the matter to continue the discussion to find the best solution for all parties involved.

H.R. 1407, 1484, and 1627, will proceed to a Subcommittee mark-up session this Thursday, May 5, 2011 at 1:30 P.M.

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