

## **Newsbytes 09-07-18**

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#### **ANC Advisory Commission Meeting**

NED Tom Snee and ADVP Brian Condon attended the Advisory Committee on Arlington National Cemetery (ANC) meeting to discuss the expansion plans and the second survey results. During the meeting, it was announced that the so-called "Southern Expansion" project that has been in the planning stages for almost 20 years, is ready to move forward with a draft plan and a timetable. This expansion plan has not been fully funded and the proposed land acquisition has not yet been authorized. It would add 37 acres to ANC, creating approximately 60,000 new internment sites targeted for completion in 2025. This expansion, along with the newly open "Millennial Project" section, will provide enough land to keep ANC open to new burials for the next 35 years, assuming there are no new eligibility policy changes. These expansions are not enough to keep ANC open "Well into the Future" (150 Years), which is the goal of the Commission recommendations.

The results of the second ANC survey were discussed during the meeting. Almost 230,000 people responded to ANC's request for public feedback, which approximately 56 percent were identified as military retirees. The most significant difference between the first and second survey is the number of people who support restrictions on veterans who can be buried at ANC. The first survey showed 35 percent supported restrictions and the second survey indicated 59 percent support restrictions. Some of these restrictions include limiting eligibility to only allow KIA, Medal of Honor and certain Valor Award recipients be buried at ANC. There could be some eligibility changes for in-ground internments while above-ground inurnments remain open to those who meet current eligibility requirements.

FRA surveyed members in 2017 regarding ANC eligibility. A very large majority (92 percent) believes ANC should pursue all possible options for acquiring additional land before making any eligibility restrictions. More than 67 percent want to reserve space for Medal of Honor recipients and/or active duty deaths. ANC is managed by the Army and does not fall under the rules and regulations of veteran's cemeteries that are administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The Secretary of the Army will be presented recommendations and then decide the best way to proceed by September 2019. The Veteran Service Organizations (VSO) in attendance, including FRA, stressed to the Advisory Committee the importance of keeping VSOs up-to-date about the latest information and decisions, in order to communicate to the larger veterans, retiree and

active duty communities. The survey results can be found on the Arlington Cemetery website. (<https://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/#/>) FRA will continue to monitor developments on this issue.

### **Advertisements Urge Administration to Protect Military from Predatory Lenders**

The Administration is considering scaling back enforcement of the Military Lending Act (MLA) by the Consumer Finance Protection Bureau (CFPB) Office of Service Members Affairs. The MLA was an FRA-supported measure passed in 2006. It had bipartisan support to help safeguard active-duty military members and their families from financial fraud, predatory loans and credit gouging. The law recognizes the risk to military readiness when service members are stressed from having excess debt at high interest rates. Among its many provisions, the law caps the annual interest rate at 36 percent for an extension of consumer credit to a service member or their dependents.

FRA and several other like-minded groups have signed onto a newspaper advertisement urging the Administration not to "abandon military families" by reducing enforcement of the MLA. The advertisement appeared in the *Washington Post*, *Stars & Stripes*, *Military Times*, *Killeen Daily Herald*, *The Hill*, *Roll Call*, *San Diego Union Tribune* and several other newspapers. A copy of the advertisement is on the [FRA website](#). Members can go to the [FRA Action Center](#) to weigh in on this issue.

### **SASC Selects New Chairman**

After the passing of Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) Chairman John McCain (Ariz.), the Republican Committee members selected Senator James Inhofe (Okla.) to serve as SASC Chairman. On the Senate floor, McConnell praised Inhofe's "rich committee experience" and his stewardship of the FY2019 National Defense Authorization Act on McCain's behalf. "Jim Inhofe filled in for Senator McCain during a difficult year. He rose to the occasion and helped lead the committee in passing crucial legislation that honored the example of his predecessor and the volunteers who defend our nation," McConnell said.

Senator Inhofe grew up in Tulsa, Oklahoma, served in the Army, and worked in real estate and insurance. He was elected to the U.S. Congress in 1986 and then elected to the Senate in 1994. He has served on SASC for eight years and in 2013-2014, Inhofe served as SASC Chairman after Senate term limit rules forced McCain to step aside. During the next term of Congress, McCain reclaimed the Chairmanship. Senator Inhofe has been serving as acting chairman for the past nine months while Senator McCain was absent. After being selected by the committee's majority members, the new chair must be approved by the GOP conference as well as the full Senate. Senator Jack Reed (R.I.) will remain SASC Ranking.

### **VA Not Fully Staffed**

The recently enacted into law: VA MISSION Act (S.2372, P.L.115-182) requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to release details about staffing levels at the VA. Currently, more than 10 percent (more than 45,000) of VA staff positions are unfilled with about 40,000 of those being in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA).

Legislators from both parties have been expressing concern about how the rising number of vacancies threatens to undermine VA care and services. They have criticized VA leaders for not doing enough to fill the open jobs and how not properly staffing hospitals and clinics undermines the ability to handle veterans' medical needs.

In a statement, VA officials said, "their health systems' workforce challenges mirror that of the larger American health care industry. There is a national shortage of healthcare professionals, especially for physicians and nurses. VHA remains fully engaged in a fiercely competitive clinical recruitment market."

FRA supported the VA MISSION Act and supports initiatives to help ensure adequate funding for the VA to ensure access and care for all beneficiaries