

**Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials Minutes**  
**May 9-10, 2017**  
**Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington, D.C.**

---

**VA**



**U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs**

**National Cemetery  
Administration**

ATTENDEES .....	3
National Cemetery Administration (NCA) Participants .....	3
Call to Order, Welcome, and Pledge of Allegiance .....	4
Acting Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, Ronald E. Walters Opening Remarks .....	4
Mr. Jeffrey “Boomer” Moragne, Advisory Committee Management Officer.....	5
Presentation of Certificates to New Committee Members .....	6
Remarks by Scott Blackburn, Acting Deputy Secretary.....	6
VA Office of General Counsel, Attorney Carol Borden.....	6
Status Update: NCA Long Range Plan.....	7
Status Update: Field Programs and Cemetery Operations Initiatives.....	7
Status Update: Veterans Outreach and Construction.....	8
Status Update: Veterans Cemetery Grants Program.....	9
Status Update: American Battle Monuments Commission .....	10
Status Update: Veterans Legacy Program .....	10
Status Update – Arlington National Cemetery .....	11
Status Update: Burial Benefits from Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) .....	12
Disposal of Old Charges .....	14
Recommendations and Endorsements .....	14
Closing Remarks, Committee Chairman .....	15

## **ATTENDEES**

### **Committee Members Present**

John (Jack) A. Kelly, Chairman  
Leslie E. Beavers, Returning Member  
Michael W. Horne, Returning Member  
Gordon W. Lightfoot, Returning Member  
Edith Gilbert Smith, Returning Member  
Heather Mitchell Braatz, New Member  
Michael S. Figlioli, New Member  
Dr. JoAnn Fisher, New Member  
James Ruester, New Member  
Marianne A. Trussell, Esq., New Member

### **Committee Members Absent**

Dr. Lewis Gordon Sumner, Jr., Returning Member  
Bonnie Carroll, New Member

### **Ex-officio Members Present**

Karen Durham-Aguilera, Executive Director, Army National Military Cemeteries  
Lieutenant Colonel Jim Renna – Army National Military Cemeteries  
Lieutenant Colonel Brent Kauffman – Army National Military Cemeteries  
Lieutenant Colonel Polaris Luu – Army National Military Cemeteries  
Walter “Wally” Frankland - American Battle Monuments Commission

### **Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Attendees**

Scott R. Blackburn, Acting Deputy Secretary for Veterans Affairs  
Carol Borden, VA Staff Attorney, Office of General Counsel  
Jefferey Moragne, Director, Advisory Committee Management Office  
Jelessa Burney, Program Specialist, Advisory Committee Management Office  
Cherl Flohr, Deputy Director, Pension & Fiduciary Service, Veterans Benefits Administration  
Tanisha Jenkins, Budget Analyst, Office of Resource Management, Veterans Benefits Administration  
Sadaf Rahmani, Chief, Direct Benefits Division, Office of Resource Management, Veterans Benefits Administration  
Eric Robinson, Alternate Designated Federal Officer, Advisory Committee on Former Prisoners of War, Veterans Benefits Administration

### **National Cemetery Administration (NCA) Participants**

Dr. Ronald E. Walters, Acting Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs  
Tom Howard, Chief of Staff, National Cemetery Administration  
Glenn R. Powers, Deputy Under Secretary for Field Programs and Cemetery Operations  
Anita Hanson, Deputy Under Secretary of Management  
Matthew Sullivan, Deputy Under Secretary for Finance and Planning  
Lisa Pozzebon, Executive Director, Cemetery Operations  
Marty Fury, Director, Cemetery Operations

Dr. Eric Powell, Director, Memorial Products Service  
George Eisenbach, Director, Veterans Cemetery Grants Program  
Patricia Tyson, Director, Communications and Outreach Service  
Bryce Carpenter, Educational Outreach Programs Officer  
Kathleen McNamanan, Acting Budget Officer  
Christine B. Hamilton, Designated Federal Officer  
Jessica Shieffer, Communications and Outreach Service  
Lawrence Provost, Communications and Outreach Service  
John Cervantes, Human Resource Management  
James Theres, NCA Speechwriter

**Public Attendees**

David Edelman, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)

**Wednesday, May 9, 2017**

The spring meeting of the VA Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials for FY 2017 was held at the 1100 First Street, NE, Washington, DC in Conference Room 104. The Committee convened at 8 a.m. for a meet and greet.

**Call to Order, Welcome, and Pledge of Allegiance**

Committee Chairman Jack Kelly called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. and gave opening remarks. Attendees recited the Pledge of Allegiance and held a moment of silence for Veterans and Active Duty Servicemembers.



*“... we have a goal, a singular goal, and that's to provide a place of memory and honor and dignity to those who have served, and their families who served with them while not actually physically being in harm's way.” – Chairman Kelly*

**Chairman Remarks**

Chairman Kelly welcomed Committee members, Ex-Officio representatives, and VA employees. He introduced Christine Hamilton as the Designated Federal Office and provided new members an opportunity to introduce themselves. He also gave an overview of the Committee’s function and goal; and afforded NCA staff and Ex-Officios a moment to share their mission and role to the group. Chairman Kelly introduced Mr. Ronald E. Walters, Interim Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs to provide opening remarks. **Note:** Mr. Walters is now the Acting Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs. Henceforth, he will be referred to as “Acting”.

**Acting Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, Ronald E. Walters Opening Remarks**

Ronald Walters opened his discussion by thanking the Committee members for choosing to serve Veterans and their families. He also thanked Chairman Kelly for his many years of service and leadership as Chairman of the Committee. Mr. Walters outlined the following NCA accomplishments:

- NCA is in the process of building new national cemeteries. Since Fiscal Year 2013, NCA has opened four national cemeteries and is working to open 14 additional

cemeteries soon. The largest of those cemeteries are: Cape Canaveral, Tallahassee, Omaha, Southern Colorado, and Western New York.

- Last year, NCA issued their 100<sup>th</sup> grant to the State of Arizona. Mr. Walters stated that this was milestone because it underscored the importance of partnership with state and tribal stakeholders. Since the Veterans Cemetery Grant Program was established in 1978, NCA has provided over \$700 million in grants to state and tribal organizations.
- NCA has 135 national cemeteries that are operated and managed by the VA. There are 105 state and tribal cemeteries that also support NCA's mission and goal of providing convenient access for burials for veterans and their families. Approximately 20 million veterans (about 92 percent of the entire veteran population) have convenient access to a burial option within 75 miles of where they live.
- In December, NCA launched Pre-Need Eligibility. Veterans and family members are now able to receive a determination regarding whether they're eligible for burial and memorial benefits at a national cemetery. This is a key customer-facing initiative, which not only helps customers with end of life planning but is also allows NCA to forecast cemetery utilization and workload projections.
- NCA is partnering with universities and other government agencies such as the Defense Information School to create digital memorialization projects, as part of our Veterans Legacy Program. Mr. Walters stated that this initiative is important because it ensures that generations to come do not forget the stories of service and sacrifice for those who are buried in our national shrines. The American Battle Monuments Commission and other organizations within the Department of Defense also help to bring these stories to life by sharing them with students at the university level, who in turn create lesson plans for middle-school level students. By doing so, this initiative allows the cemeteries to be used as a platform for public education.

### **Chairman Remarks**

Chairman Kelly introduced Mr. Jeffrey "Boomer" Moragne, Director, Advisory Committee Management Office.

### **Mr. Jeffrey "Boomer" Moragne, Advisory Committee Management Officer**

Mr. Jeffrey Moragne provided an overview of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) and importance of adhering to the FACA guidelines as Special Government Employees (SGEs). In accordance to the Sunshine Law, all Committee meetings, other than administrative, are open to the public; and subject to Privacy and Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. Mr. Moragne also stressed the importance of maintaining a balanced membership based upon skillsets, experience, and demographics.

### **Presentation of Certificates to New Committee Members**

Chairman Jack Kelly, Acting Deputy Secretary, Scott Blackburn; and the Acting Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, Ron Walters, presented a certificate to new Committee members: Heather M. Braatz, Marianne Trussell, Esq., James Ruester, Michael Figlioli, and Dr. JoAnn Fisher.



*To Heather Mitchell Braatz,*

*Acting Deputy Secretary*

### **Chairman Remarks**

Chairman Kelly reconvened the meeting and gave the floor to Mr. Ron Walters.

### **Acting Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs Remarks**

Mr. Walters introduced Mr. Scott R. Blackburn, who was appointed as the Interim Deputy Secretary on February 26th, 2017. **Note:** Mr. Blackburn is now the Acting Under Secretary for Veterans Affairs. Henceforth, he will be referred to as “Acting”.

### **Remarks by Scott Blackburn, Acting Deputy Secretary**

Mr. Blackburn commended NCA on ranking number one in the American Customer Satisfaction Index award for the six consecutive time and commended the Committee for being highly efficient over the past 12 years, with implantation of 90% of its recommendations. Mr. Blackburn discussed the MyVA Transformation and VA’s cultural move from rules-based to principle-based; to cross-organization collaboration; and continuous improvement. Mr. Blackburn also discussed VA Secretary, David Shulkin’s top five priorities:

- Providing greater choice
- Modernizing VA systems
- Shifting resources (eliminating duplications and focusing resources)
- Improving timeliness
- Suicide prevention

### **Chairman Remarks**

Chairman Kelly introduced Attorney Carol Borden, Office of General Counsel Attorney, for committee overview and ethics training.

### **VA Office of General Counsel, Attorney Carol Borden**

Ms. Borden discussed the ethics rules governing SGE’s and provided contact information. She provided the annual compliance briefing that covers the two major components of ethics laws: standards of ethical conduct for the Executive Branch (not using public office for personal gain and not giving any unauthorized preferential treatment) and criminal conflict of interest. Attorney Borden also discussed the requirement to file financial disclosures and reminded Committee members about the requirements to sign and submit their Ethics Review statements upon completion of their training.

### **Committee Chairman Remarks**

Chairman Kelly recessed the Committee for lunch.

### **Break for Lunch-11:53 – 12:38pm**

### **Chairman Remarks**

Chairman Kelly reconvened the Committee and noted that the record will remain open for public comments. Chairman Kelly acknowledged Lieutenant Colonel Kauffman as sitting in for Karen Durham-Aguilera, Executive Director, Army Military National Cemeteries, until her arrival. He introduced Mr. Matthew Sullivan, Deputy Under Secretary for Finance and Planning, who provided a status update on the NCA's Long Range Plan.

### **Status Update: NCA Long Range Plan**

Last year, senior leadership met to chart the course of NCA for the next five years through 2021. NCA established five main strategic goals:

- 1) Veterans and eligible family members will have increased access to burial benefits
- 2) More veterans and eligible family members will use VA burial and memorial benefits
- 3) Veterans will be memorialized through enhanced tributes befitting their service and sacrifice to the nation
- 4) Stakeholders will place greater trust in NCA based on enhanced accountability
- 5) Stakeholders will be served more efficiently and effectively by NCA's internal capacity

NCA is currently working to open 14 more cemeteries between now and 2021; increase utilization of burial and memorial products; and utilize technology to increase the quality and timeliness of burial services and to enhance memorialization.

### **Chairman Remarks**

Chairman Kelly introduced Mr. Glenn Powers, Deputy Under-Secretary for Field Programs and Cemetery Operations, who provided an update on Service Initiatives.

### **Status Update: Field Programs and Cemetery Operations Initiatives**

- Mr. Powers reorganized Field Programs (now Field Programs and Cemetery Operations) to provide better support for cemeteries; scheduling of burials, and requests for memorial products
- Under congressionally mandated Public Law 114-315 –Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2016, NCA is implementing a weekend burial pilot by the end of Fiscal Year 2017. The pilot will include cremation only burials on one Saturday per month. The participating cemeteries are: Calverton National Cemetery, Florida National Cemetery, Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery, Ft. Snelling National Cemetery, Ft. Bliss National Cemetery, and Riverside National Cemetery
- NCA launched the Pre-Need Determinations of Eligibility program in December 2016. Over 23, 700 applications were received through April 30, 2017. Eligible applicants will receive a determination letter and a blue envelope to store supporting documents, such as DD 214s. Chairman Kelly pointed out that the blue envelope was a recommendation from the Advisory Committee.
- NCA currently working on the integration of Global Positioning System (GPS)/Global Information System (GIS) to strengthen the ability to track and account for remains and

to meet future burial needs. GPS/GIS technology is being used to correlate digital images of headstones and markers to records in the database; and to develop interactive mapping of cemeteries. The target is 85 cemeteries over the next four years (13 in 2017).

- NCA is planning for the implementation of “Natural Burial Sections” in new national cemetery projects to provide Veterans with alternatives to traditional burial methods. A Natural Burial or “Green” burial is generally defined as any interment that has less impact on the environment than a traditional burial, whether casket or cremation. Natural Burial Sections are currently included in new national cemeteries in Southern Colorado, Western New York, and Morovis, Puerto Rico.

### **Chairman Remarks**

Chairman Kelly introduced Ms. Anita Hanson, Deputy Under-Secretary for Management, who provided an update on Veterans outreach and major construction projects.

### **Status Update: Veterans Outreach and Construction**

- NCA continues to partner with Veterans Service Organizations to speak at conventions and to distribute NCA outreach materials as exhibitors at conventions
- Outreach to other government entities is growing. In January 2017, we began outreach to the State Division of Veterans Affairs/Services for the entire country. About 20 states were very responsive in promoting our pre need program and other NCA benefits to their service officers. This was also replicated for the Mayor’s Office of Veterans Affairs in Washington, D.C. and will soon feature our pre need information on the website of the Mayor’s Office of Veterans Affairs for the City of New York.
- The use of social media and Gov-Delivery enables information to be readily and quickly shared with partners and stakeholders, such as Funeral Directors and family members. For example, Gov-Delivery email blast was used to broadcast the availability of the new Daily Burial Schedule and weather events in an area.
- NCA is also partnering with the Veterans Benefits Administration, Veterans Health Administration (VHA), VHA Social Work Network of Caregivers; Hospice and Palliative Care Providers and the Major League Baseball spring training baseball games.
- NCA’s outreach requires the broad outreach of the five cemetery Districts and their local national cemeteries.
- NCA is also working on new products, such as redesigning our outreach banners that are used by our 135 plus national cemeteries, District and Memorial Products Service personnel; and expanding digital outreach to social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) and GovDelivery subscribers.
- The new Office of Public Engagement will allow NCA to expand the outreach efforts.
- NCA continues to obligate funds for construction projects. The FY 15 Operating Plan (OP) of \$51 million amounted to **48 projects**. The final official minor construction

obligations for the **FY15 totaled \$64,990,522.15**, which is **94.6%** of plan. FY 16 Budget Request is **\$69.05 million**

- FY16 OP of \$69 million amounted to **43 projects**, plus mini-minors for the 5 Districts; The final minor construction obligations for the **FY16 totaled \$72,154,386.95**, which is **80.65%** of plan. FY17 Budget is **\$86 million**. FY18 Budget Request **\$138 million**.
- Chairman Kelly asked for the definition of minor construction. Mr. Sullivan clarified that minor construction is defined as any construction at or below \$10 million. Minor construction appropriation is used for smaller gravesite expansions and facility or infrastructure projects. A major construction project above \$10 million requires congressional approval.
- 17 of 19 projects awarded for FY15 construction have been completed. (Averaging less than 1% cost growth and less than 10% time growth from construction award)
- 11 of 16 projects award for FY16 construction have been completed or had an early turnover. (Averaging less than 1% cost growth and around 6% time growth from construction award)

### **Chairman Remarks**

Chairman Kelly introduced Mr. George Eisenbach, Director, Veterans Cemetery Grants Program.

### **Status Update: Veterans Cemetery Grants Program**

- Mr. Eisenbach provided an overview of the Veterans Cemetery Grants Program, which came into existence in 1978. He reported that the first grants were awarded in 1990. Since that time, NCA has awarded over \$714 million in grants.
- Currently, there are 105 State and tribal cemeteries in 47 states across the country.
- At the time of application, State or tribal entities are under no financial obligation. However, in order to receive a VA grant, they must have ten percent matching funds and legislation in place to manage the cemetery.
- NCA's Compliance Review Team is responsible for conducting inspections to ensure compliance to NCA operation standards and measures. NCA also provides training for employees in the new cemeteries.
- The FY17 Priority List contains 101 projects valued at \$283 million. The priority list is broken down into two funding groups: (1) 49 projects with ten percent matching funds and legislation; and (2) 51 projects are missing legislation and/or funding.
- In FY18, the Priority list will be re-ranked based upon the two funding groups.
- The Charles Duncan Buried with Honors Act of 2016 authorizes VA to provide a casket or urn for a deceased veteran to be buried in a national veterans' cemetery, state veterans'

cemetery, or tribal cemetery, if the deceased veteran does not have sufficient resources to cover to cost. At the current time, NCA is working to develop reimbursement and accountability processes for state and tribal cemeteries.

- Committee Member Leslie Beavers noted the inequity regarding the plot allowance paid by VBA. Currently, reimbursement is not payable for the plot in a private cemetery.

### **Chairman Remarks**

Chairman Kelly introduced Mr. Wallace (Wally) Franklin, American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC).

### **Status Update: American Battle Monuments Commission**

- Mr. Franklin gave an overview of the history of American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC).
- AMBC's has three primary functions:
  - 1) Commemorate the service and achievement of the U.S. Armed Forces that served overseas, since the 6th of April 1917, World War I. AMBC also commemorates the service and achievement of the U.S. Armed Forces in the United States is required by public law, i.e. World War II Memorial
  - 2) Design and build and maintain the overseas cemeteries
  - 3) Control the design and construction and long-term maintenance of private memorials
- ABMC has 26 cemeteries and 27 memorials around the world. The Lafayette Escadrille Memorial was dedicated on April 6th, 2017. It is a private monument built after World War I, which is a tribute to American Air Power Pioneers that fought with the French before our entry into World War I. There are 50 Americans and two Frenchmen buried in the crypts in this monument.
- ABMC is also collaborates with NCA on number of projects, to include: the replacement of headstones at Clarks Veterans Cemetery; maintaining the Honolulu Memorial located in NCA's National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific; cross-training and sharing of best practices; and working with universities to develop educational materials for the students.

### **Chairman Remarks**

Chairman Kelly thanked Mr. Franklin for his update and turned the floor over to the NCA Chief of Staff, Mr. Tom Howard. Mr. Howard introduced Dr. Bryce Carpenter, Director, Veterans Legacy Program.

### **Status Update: Veterans Legacy Program**

NCA partnered with San Francisco State University, Black Hills State University, and the University of Central Florida. A team of scholars in each university have made a connection with a nearby national cemetery to collaborate on stories of the veterans interred those cemeteries. The scholars teach undergraduates and graduate students on how to engage in

veteran biographical research. The research is turned into a variety of different products and shared with local K-12 students. The Veteran's Legacy Program consists of:

- **Teacher-developed Lesson Plans, Aligned to Core Standards**, focused on Veteran service, use wide-ranging primary sources, incorporate storytelling and interactive features, draw on NCA and partner resources for learning, and promote awareness of VA national cemeteries.
- **Interactive Maps and Video Vignettes** to assist the on-site and the virtual visitor to navigate significant features in VA's cemeteries and highlight our Veterans, historic memorials and VA national cemeteries.
- **Workshops, Seminars and Tours** to provide opportunities for teachers, students, and the general public to engage in educational programs at VA cemeteries and online.
- **Innovative Research Opportunities**, which will be stimulated by VA's historically diverse cemeteries including Veterans' personal stories, and memorial landscapes. NCA's professional historians provide access to documentation from the NCA History Collection about burials and historic resources at one of VA's 135 national cemeteries and 33 soldiers' lots and monument sites.

NCA is also in partnership with ABMC on their education program, titled "Understanding Sacrifice" and the Library of Congress on the Veterans History Project.

### **Chairman Remarks**

Chairman Kelly introduces Ms. Karen Durham-Aguilera, Executive Director, Army National Military Cemeteries

### **Status Update – Arlington National Cemetery**

Ms. Durham-Aguilera provided an overview of Arlington National Cemetery daily functions, operations and future initiatives. Arlington, which is overseen by the U.S. Army, is the busiest Army National Cemetery (ANC) in the country, with 160 interments per week, 6 days per week. In FY16, ANC had over 7,000 interments.

ANC's priorities are:

1. **Readiness of people, equipment and resources** (managing daily operations to keep up with the high demand of requests and all services are conducted with dignity and honor)
2. **Taking Care of People** (maintaining the balance between funeral services and National Shrine status for public visitations/events)
3. **The Future of ANC:**
  - Millennium Project - adds another 27 acres or about 27,000 new burial opportunities
  - Southern Expansion – adds 25 years of cemetery lifetime; involves the acquisition with the County and Commonwealth of Virginia
  - Finding new ways to use existing space, such as moving utilities, sustainment complex which stores heavy equipment and materials
  - Advisory Committee on Arlington National Cemetery to discuss eligibility
  - Memoriam without remains

### **Chairman Remarks opens the floor to Oral Public Comments**

Chairman Kelly opened the meeting for public comment and restated that the meeting was open for public comment during the entire day. There were no oral public comments.

### **Chairman Remarks**

The meeting was then opened for discussion/questions. Chairman Kelly covered the agenda for the followed day and adjourned the meeting at 4:30pm.

### **Thursday, May 10, 2017**

The Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials reconvened at 1100 First Street, NE, Washington, DC in Conference Room 104. The Committee convened at 8 a.m. for a meet and greet.

### **Chairman Remarks**

Chairman Kelly called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. and gave opening remarks. Attendees recited the Pledge of Allegiance and held a moment of silence for Veterans and Active Duty Servicemembers. Chairman Kelly covered the agenda for the day and stated that the comment period will be open until 3:45pm.

Chairman Kelly recapped the status updates provided on the previous day. The Committee discussed outreach for the pre-need program and the need to set resources against the expectations. The Committee also discussed digital memorialization and the Veterans Legacy Program. Chairman Kelly introduced Mr. Matthew Sullivan, Deputy Under Secretary for Finance and Planning to provide a status update on Burial Benefits.

### **Status Update: Burial Benefits from Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)**

Mr. Sullivan discussed the Committee's previous recommendation for NCA to explore in creating a separate account for all burial activities funded from mandatory appropriations and transfer the funds, management, and administration from VBA to NCA.

Mr. Sullivan discussed the portfolio of burial benefits that is jointly managed by both VBA and NCA. He pointed out that VBA receives a mandatory appropriation for burial benefits. VBA transfers funding to NCA to manage the Headstone and Markers Program, pre-placed crypts, gravesite lines, and the Unclaimed Remains Casket and Urn Reimbursement program. The bulk of funding for burial benefits resides with VBA to manage burial and plot allowances, burial flags, and transportation of remains.

Chairman Kelly asked if there has been any discussion about shifting certain VBA roles to NCA. Mr. Sullivan stated that for the first time VBA and NCA have a working group to collaborate on legislative proposals. Previously, the review process was coordinated separately. The working group meets monthly to work on legislative proposals and other statutory and regulatory authorities related to burial benefits.

VA may reimburse applicants for costs associated with the purchase of a casket or urn for the interment of Veterans with no known next of kin where sufficient resources are not available. NCA began processing applications and payment for casket and urn reimbursement on May 13, 2015. This authority was recently been expanded to State and tribal cemeteries.

Mr. Sullivan introduced Ms. Kathleen McManaman, NCA Acting Director of Budget, and VBA colleagues, Cheryl Flohr, Deputy Director, Pension and Fiduciary Service, Sadaf Rahmani, Office of Resource Management, and Tanisha Jenkins, Office of Resource Management.

Ms. McManaman reported that VBA obligated over \$230 million for burial benefits, which came out of the Compensation and Pension Mandatory account. She explained that a VBA have advance appropriations for full funding at the beginning of every fiscal year. The NCA monitors the obligation of funds on a weekly basis. The remaining funds are for burial payments.

Ms. Flohr explained that the remaining funds are for monetary funds going out to either an individual or an institution, such as a funeral home. She also explained that there are various entitlements to burial allowances for service-connected deaths, non-service connected deaths, and deaths in VA Medical Center or Veterans Health Administration (VHA) contracted facility.

To make the determinations, VBA employees access the C&P claims processing system. If a Veteran was in receipt of compensation or pension, his or her spouse on their award will automatically pay the burial allowance without an application or human interaction. Similarly, if the Veteran was in receipt of 100 percent rating for 10 years or more, those payments will automatically pay the surviving spouse of record. Since July 2014, VBA has paid more than 85,000 automatic burial payments.

Member Michael Horne asked if there' the potential for a duplication of funds if a Veteran is buried in a national cemetery and the surviving spouse receives an auto-paid check. Ms. Flohr clarified that a plot allowance is not a payable if when the burial is in a national cemetery. Ms. McManaman further clarified that payments for plot allowances are not automated. Chairman Kelly recommended that from a MyVA concept, it may be beneficial if there were a better nomenclature to distinguish burial allowances versus plot allowances.

VBA adjudicators are specially trained to review records to determine if there is a potential entitlement to service-connected burial benefits based upon regulations. VHA may be asked for a medical opinion on the etiology of the Veteran's death and the relationship to a service-connected condition or presumptive condition based upon the period of service.

Advantages to VBA involvement:

- More efficient administration of burial benefits with access to compensation and pension data
- Ability to automate certain burial benefit payments to Veterans' spouses, without requiring the surviving spouse to apply, based on existing compensation and pension benefits data

Steps that would be required to create a separate account:

- Involve VA's Office of Information Technology, Office of Budget, and Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs to evaluate feasibility
- Enact both authorizing and appropriating legislation

- Appropriate significant funding to hire and train employees in NCA, establish processing and financial systems, and ensure appropriate financial management and internal controls are in place.

### **Disposal of Old Charges**

The Committee recommends that NCA offer “new” digital memorials for Veterans interred in national cemeteries, containing the initial format on the headstone, and examine/explore academic research and legacy information to be included. The Chair will appoint a working group to assist with this project. *Approved by unanimous consent*

**Note:** The Committee recommends NCA continue to maintain the suite of Burial Services Benefits videos electronically on NCA’s Funeral Director page and VA’s YouTube channel. In terms of print products, the Committee is especially impressed by the quality and design of full-color “tri-fold” print products. The Committee agreed that the products should be easy to read and no higher than 10<sup>th</sup> grade; in a human-centered design, which includes images of Women Veterans; and in a format, which will allow customers to easily distinguish between the pamphlets.

In December 2016, Congress mandated a study on weekend burials at national cemeteries. NCA’s Long Range Plan (2016-2021) contains a strategy to implement weekend burials. The Committee recommends conclusion of further action on the recommendation and urges NCA staff to take into consideration facts identified by the task force that examined this issue.

*Approved by unanimous consent*

### **Recommendations and Endorsements**

Committee members and NCA leadership discuss Advisory Committee recommendations and made endorsements.

**Recommendation #1:** The Committee recommends that the Memorial Products Service group utilize the services of the US Army Institute of Heraldry in the design of a medallion to honor Medal of Honor recipients. The design shall be provided to a Committee working group for review and final recommendation. Following recommendation, the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs shall forward a copy of the design to the Congressional Medal of Honor Society seeking input prior to production and usage. The Chair will appoint a working group to assist with this project. *Approved by unanimous consent*

**Recommendation #2:** The Committee recommends that NCA take immediate steps to assume responsibility for the maintenance and operation of the nine (9) Department of the Army cemeteries (noted on the NCA Cemetery Divestiture Proposal), the Department of Interior, National Park Service National Cemeteries, and any other cemeteries operated or maintained by other Department of Defense organizations that are not on an active military installation. It is not the intent to seek maintenance or operations for any cemetery on an active military installation, Arlington National Cemetery, American Battle Monuments Commission, and the United States Soldiers’ and Airmen’s Home National Cemetery.

The Committee further recommends that the NCA be designated as the primary federal agency responsible for the burial and memorialization of Veterans and their eligible dependents,

including but not limited to, the maintenance and operational standards of cemeteries. (Note: revise “eligible dependents” language to VA policy language) ***Approved by unanimous consent***

**Recommendation #3:** The Committee recommends that NCA establish an NCA Outreach Ambassador Program which provides a model by which Committee members have increased access to outreach opportunities and receive suitable staff support (training; materials etc.) The Chair will appoint a working group to assist with this project. The Committee strongly supports NCA’s new Office of Public Engagement, which seeks to enhance outreach efforts, particularly with new digital projects and partnerships with the educational and academic communities. The Committee looks forward to working with the new Executive Director, Office of Public Engagement to continue to enhance NCA’s outreach efforts. ***Approved by unanimous consent***

**Closing Remarks, Committee Chairman**

Chairman Kelly offered closing remarks and thanked the Advisory Committee members for their participation. The date and location of the next Advisory Committee meeting is to be determined.

**Meeting Adjourned**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John A. Kelly". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping "J" and "K".

John A. (Jack) Kelly  
Committee Chair