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Secretary Wilkie honors President Lincoln's second inaugural address giving VA its mission and motto

WASHINGTON — Today, Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Robert Wilkie dedicated a permanent memorial at the Camp Butler National Cemetery in Springfield, IL, celebrating President Lincoln's second inaugural address which gave VA its mission and motto.

The plaque rests at a VA-run cemetery in the city that became Lincoln's home. Next to the plaque is an interpretive sign that explains how Lincoln's words would come to serve as VA's motto and that vision grew into the department we know today.

March 4, 1865, Lincoln stood at the U.S. Capitol and sought to heal the nation in one of the most important speeches in American history. At the end of his remarks, Lincoln asked the nation to care for those Americans who take the oath and fight to defend us, a call that VA still answers today.

"With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan – to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations," Lincoln said.

Under Secretary Wilkie's direction, all 145 VA national cemeteries will display these interpretive signs, so all Americans understand the importance of VA's mission.

"Today's VA welcomes all Veterans, including the 10% of all Veterans who are women. The words that brought us here should not to be diluted, parsed or cancelled," Wilkie said. "The words that brought us here ought to be preserved as they were spoken and displayed so every generation understands the origin of America's progress in becoming the most tolerant nation on earth."

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