

To restore this privilege, and to guarantee its continuation in the future, the American Legion recommends:

First, that jurisdiction for the administration and maintenance of all national cemeteries be assigned to the Administrator of Veterans' Affairs;

Second, that the Administrator of Veterans' Affairs be given the responsibility and authority to develop a national cemetery system that will be adequate for the burial of those potentially eligible; and

Third, that those committees of Congress which have legislative responsibility for veterans' affairs also have jurisdiction over national cemetery matters.

We are pleased, Mr. Chairman, that the House of Representatives, by approval of resolution 241 on October 20, 1967, has amended its rules to provide that national cemeteries, other than those under the Department of Interior, are now under the legislative oversight of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs. We commend your intention to hold hearings on national cemeteries during this session of Congress.

Needless to say, our anticipation of constructive approaches to the national cemetery problem was heightened by the President's veterans' message on January 30, 1968, when he said:

Every veteran who wants it—those who risked their lives at Belleau Wood, Iwo Jima and the DMZ—should have the right of burial in a national cemetery situated reasonably close to his home. I have asked the Administrator of Veterans' Affairs to make certain that the recommendations of the Veterans' Advisory Commission include proposals to assure this right in a meaningful sense.

Fourth, appropriation of funds sufficient for the Administrator of Veterans' Affairs to carry out the benefit programs for which he is responsible.

Members of this committee and the American Legion know that strong and valid reasons support the belief that veterans' programs are a meaningful expression of the gratitude and concern of a grateful Nation to those who have served it, particularly in time of war, and that these programs should not be the victim of any move to economize in the expenditures of the Federal Government.

A discussion of the VA budget in terms of dollars spent in relation to the gross national product, or in relation to any other national standard, is frequently necessary to illustrate the ability of the Nation's economy to bear the cost of the program established or to be enlarged on by the Congress at the urging of the people of the Nation. Such discussion becomes more meaningful when we talk of the calculated or projected costs in relation to the person to be served by these programs.

The committee and the people are in agreement, we think, with the concept that economy at the expense of benefits and service to these wards of the Veterans' Administration, or to their dependents and survivors, is a false economy—one not in keeping with our country's long-existing policy that it provide its war veterans with a program of benefits that reflects the esteem in which our Nation's veterans are held by those whom they served.

As you know, the American Legion is not against economies achieved through improved planning, organization, or modern management principles. It is, however, opposed to achieving economy by the lessening of service, curtailment or reduction of needed benefits, or by the destruction of the concept that the veteran is a special citizen because of