

(6) That the burial allowance not be denied to any veteran because of the existence of any other burial or death benefit, public or private.

Responsible witnesses testifying before this commission on March 26 and 27 and April 1, 1968, seemed to be in agreement that the present national cemetery system is in need of revision and that a workable long-range, comprehensive plan is desired for an orderly process of expansion. The Veterans' Administration over the past decade has outstandingly proven its flexible and capable abilities to conquer other serious problems associated with the changing needs of the Nation's veterans, i.e., improving hospital construction, providing community and nursing home beds for veterans, streamlining the numerous insurance programs into an administratively efficient operation, introducing new educational programs for beneficiaries, establishing more realistic compensation and pension programs, etc. We feel that the Veterans' Administration is adequately equipped to administer this new national cemetery program, within the continental limits of the United States.

In favoring legislation to expand and place the national cemetery system under the direction of the Veterans' Administration, we are aware that much concern will be expressed by many citizens regarding expenses for land acquisition suitable to planning and use for the future needs of the national cemetery system.

Based on a recent study relating to land acquisition for burial use, conducted by AMVETS, and presented to your committee on April 4, 1968, we strongly feel that a feasibility study broader in scope should be made, designed to explore matters concerning the national cemetery system by a task force designated by this committee.

We would further recommend as part of the assignment of this task force or special committee, that heavy concentration should be centered upon the possibility of procuring available Federal Government properties which would be acceptable as suitable land for burial purposes and in appropriate geographical locations, within the continental limits of the United States.

We feel that certain Veterans' Administration hospital properties may be in excess of the needs of the hospital and consideration should be extended to the possibilities of utilizing these lands.

Another area that should be explored is the possibility of the use of available lands in or around U.S. military installations in the country.

We feel that a close examination should be made of other available, suitable properties that could be obtained through gifts either from the respective States or other sources, within the continental limits of the United States.

As another consideration, AMVETS feels that serious thought should be given to the proposal of constructing columbaria, a series of vault-like structures with recesses for the interment of urns, where feasible, at all existing or new national cemeteries for purposes of conserving acreage and minimizing care, expense, etc. These columbaria could be so planned and engineered, that ground floor expansion could be provided for in addition to the possible utilization of air space. In addition, these types of buildings would enhance the beauty and solemnity of the surroundings of the final resting place of eligible veterans.