

**HEARING ON MISMANAGEMENT OF CONTRACTS
AT ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY
July 29, 2010**

Opening Statement

This hearing will now come to order.

Arlington National Cemetery is the nation's most sacred burial ground for veterans and their families, a national shrine, and an emblem of the courage and sacrifice of so many throughout our nation's history. It is also a place where a small group of people, from the grounds crew to the Old Guard, work tirelessly ensure that our service members are honored.

Over the last year, I have learned of shocking stories about Arlington. Bodies accidentally buried in the same graves. Unmarked and mismarked graves. Urns of cremated remains being found in the Cemetery's landfill. And the heartbreaking tragedy of the families who now cannot trust the Cemetery to tell them where their loved ones are buried.

In June, the U.S. Army Inspector General released a report finding major flaws in the operation of Arlington National Cemetery. The Army Inspector General found hundreds of mistakes associated with graves and substantiated many of the reports that had previously appeared in the media.

The Army Inspector General found that the failure to implement an effective automated system to manage burials at the Cemetery contributed to these mistakes. The Army Inspector General also found that the contracts awarded to acquire components of the proposed system for the Cemetery failed to comply with applicable federal, Defense, and Army regulations.

Senator Brown and I called today's hearing to examine how contract mismanagement at Arlington National Cemetery resulted in this scandal.

My staff has prepared a memorandum summarizing what we have learned from our investigation. I ask for unanimous consent that the memo and the documents it cites be made part of the hearing record.

More than ten years ago, the Army began the development of a new system to automate the management of burial operations at Arlington National Cemetery. From the beginning, the acquisition process was plagued with problems.

One problem was that Cemetery and Army officials decided to create a new system instead of using or modifying the system already used by the Department of Veterans Affairs. This system, called BOSS, was developed by

government employees and cost about \$2.4 million in total, including the costs of automating more than 2.2 million burial records. And it works.

Instead, the Cemetery asked the Army's Center for Contracting Excellence and the Army Corps of Engineers to award a series of contracts to develop their own system, called the Total Cemetery Management System, or TCMS.

The Cemetery has spent between \$5.5 and \$8 million on the TCMS program to date. And today, Arlington National Cemetery still does not have a system that can accurately track graves and manage burial operations.

One reason for this was the lack of management and oversight. The Army contracting officials who were responsible for these contracts awarded sole-source contracts with ensuring that the contractors were able to do the work. They failed to make sure that the government was paying a fair price.

In addition, the responsible officials outside the Cemetery failed to conduct even the most basic oversight. Officials within the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, who have been responsible for the Cemetery's budget for the last decade, merely reviewed the materials submitted by the Cemetery to Congress regarding TCMS. They did not see

the red flags. They did not ask any additional questions that would have helped bring these problems to light earlier.

We have also learned that there has been no review of Arlington National Cemetery for the last decade. No review of the contracts. And, what is even more appalling to me, as a former state auditor, no one has performed any audit whatsoever.

And we now know that the problems with graves at Arlington may be far more extensive than previously acknowledged. At a conservative estimate, 4,900 to 6,600 graves may be unmarked, improperly marked, or mislabeled on the Cemetery's maps.

We are here today because we owe our veterans better. We owe their families better. We owe better to the Americans who expect their government to not fritter away their money on wasteful contracts. And the officials who let this happen – whether through ignorance, incompetence, or denial – need to be held accountable.

This week, I have received written testimony for the hearing from a number of veterans organizations, including the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, the Reserve Officers Association, The Retired Enlisted

Association, the Military Officers Association of America, and the National Association for Uniformed Services. I am grateful for their participation in the Subcommittee's hearing. Although this is the Subcommittee on Contracting Oversight, what is most important is to get this right for all the veterans and their families who have sacrificed so much for our country.

In their statement, Veterans of Foreign Wars, one of the nation's largest and oldest veterans' associations, which also happens to be based in Kansas City wrote:

“What occurred at Arlington is a national disgrace, yet the VFW hopes it will serve as a wakeup call ... [T]he failure at Arlington National Cemetery ... was allowed to occur by a hands-off attitude by those more senior in the chain-of-command, who may have regarded their oversight responsibility more as an additional duty than a primary mission.”

I hope today's hearing is a very loud, very clear wakeup call to everyone involved. Ultimately, the issue before the Subcommittee is whether the Army has failed in its duty to the men and women who have served our country so well. Today's hearing will give our members a chance to examine this important question.

