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MCCASKILL LOOKS AT NEXT STEPS FOR ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

Senator cites successfully managed Missouri cemetery as she chairs hearing assessing continued need for improvements at Arlington

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The management of Arlington National Cemetery has improved dramatically over the past year—but the continued need for a full accounting of graves, standard operating procedures, a long-term master management plan, and action to address lingering contract management problems were among the findings at a Senate hearing today chaired by U.S. Senator Claire McCaskill.

McCaskill, who led the effort to reform the cemetery after revelations of chronic mismanagement, questioned witnesses today including Arlington’s director, the U.S. Army’s Inspector General, and representatives from the Government Accountability Office. The panel agreed that McCaskill’s efforts have resulted in critical improvements, and outlined necessary next steps.

“I want to commend Ms. Condon and the staff at Arlington for their efforts over the past 18 months,” said McCaskill, Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Contracting Oversight. “The amount of progress that has been made is substantial and significant. Within 18 months, we have a completely different protocol at Arlington as it relates to accountability and I think it’s good. We still have work to do. I’ve said from the beginning that the oversight of this committee would not end until people sat in front of this dais and said, ‘I think the challenges have been met.’”

Of the steps still to be taken, cemetery director Kathryn Condon explained that approximately 64,000 interment sites remain which must be examined and proper information confirmed. As it stands, Arlington's new management team has confirmed through manual accounting procedures that at least 70,000 more people are buried at Arlington than were previously thought.

Following a recent report by the Government Accountability Office, the panel specifically reviewed the management of federal contracts at Arlington. The report found that, although improvements have strengthened contract management at the cemetery, the Army still lacks the capability to identify and track all contracts supporting Arlington's operations.

McCaskill cited the successful management of the State Veterans Cemetery in Springfield, Mo., and asked the witnesses how those lessons could be applied at Arlington. Last year, McCaskill evaluated successful management tools at the Springfield cemetery, hoping to bring those lessons back to the nation's capital.

"I wanted to compare and contrast what I had seen at Arlington at the height of this mess, compared to what is ongoing at another cemetery, and I went to another cemetery in Springfield, Missouri," McCaskill said. "And I was very impressed at what they had done there in regards to tracking and maintaining."

McCaskill also used the hearing to question the witnesses on [recent reports](#) of problems at cemeteries managed by the Department of Veterans Affairs, and promised further oversight over Arlington until all of the major challenges have been solved.

McCaskill has championed efforts to reform management of Arlington, [successfully passing legislation](#) in December 2010. In November of last year, McCaskill got a [firsthand look](#) at the cemetery's progress, saying she was "encouraged" by progress being made to address revelations of unmarked and mismarked graves of veterans. Reforms and new procedures implemented at the cemetery as a result of McCaskill's legislation include:

- A complete manual inventory, recording, and photographing of more than 259,000 interment and inurnment sites at the cemetery
- A new computerized, auditable system for bringing together all relevant information on each site (burial records, death certificates, site photograph)
- A digital mapping system of each site (with up to three-inch accuracy) and new online scheduling for families of veterans to request interments and determine the design of gravesite markers before the day of burial

Arlington spent approximately \$35 million on 56 contracts and task orders in 2010 and the first three quarters of 2011. These included contracts for construction, facility maintenance, operations, and information technology system enhancements at the cemetery.

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