



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
UNDER SECRETARY FOR MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON DC 20420

August 12, 2016

The Honorable Jared Huffman
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Huffman:

Thank you for your July 7, 2016, co-signed letter to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) regarding the National Cemetery Administration's (NCA) policy on display of Confederate flags in VA national cemeteries. I wanted to advise you of actions that NCA has taken and those we are working on to address this issue. I am responding on behalf of the Department.

VA is committed to providing our Veterans with the timely, high-quality care and services that they have earned and deserve. As you are aware, NCA Directive 3220, *Flags in VA National Cemeteries*, provides for limited display of Confederate flags in VA national cemeteries. This document contains NCA policy on all flag displays in our national cemeteries.

NCA has monitored the discussions, both in Congress and in the public arena, regarding the display of Confederate flags. We are aware of the concerns of those who wish to see Confederate flags removed from public venues because they are perceived by many as a symbol of racial intolerance. We are also aware that the national cemeteries originated during the Civil War and that they are the final resting places of those who served on both sides of that conflict and, as such, flags of the Confederacy are also viewed by some merely as historical symbols. Our current policy is intended to permit recognition of differing views by allowing, on certain days, citizens to honor, as Americans, the memory of those who served in the armed forces of the Confederate States of America (CSA) through display of the Confederate flag, but it imposes strict limitations on such flag displays.

Over the last year, NCA conducted a review of its policy in light of evolving sensitivities regarding the display of the Confederate flag. We chose not to amend the policy until Congress finalized its action concerning Confederate flag displays to ensure that changes would be consistent with any Congressional mandate. Although it appears that Congress will not adopt any modifications proposed by the House of Representatives, NCA has decided to revise its policy in a manner that is consistent with House Amendment 1064 to H.R. 4974. In particular, we will amend our policy to make clear that Confederate flags will not be displayed from any permanently fixed flagpole in a national cemetery at any time. We will, however, retain our policy of allowing sponsoring organizations to place individual gravesite Confederate flags (provided by the organization) on gravesites of those who served in CSA armed forces, but only on specified days. We will also permit the display of Confederate flags during ceremonies that are approved by NCA.

We want to emphasize that these changes will not affect our current policy concerning committal services. Section 2404(h)(1)(C) of title 38 United States Code requires VA to ensure that families may display "any religious or other symbols" chosen by the family at the committal service of someone who is being interred at a national ceremony. NCA will not interfere with a family's choice to display a flag, including a Confederate flag, as part of a committal service, other than to limit such display to the confines of the committal shelter or the location where the service takes place.

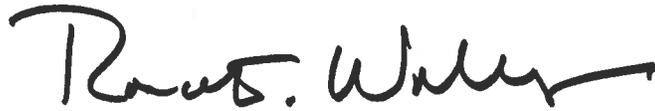
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We look forward to working on these efforts with you and your staff in the future. Should you have any questions or concerns, please have a member of your staff contact Ms. Mandy Hartman, Congressional Relations Officer, at (202) 461-6416 or by email at Mandy.Hartman@va.gov. A similar letter is being sent to the cosigners of your letter.

Thank you for your continued support of our mission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ronald E. Walters". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Ronald E. Walters
Interim Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs