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November 3, 2003

This Veterans Day, enhance burial benefits for America's heroes

Dear Colleague,

As Veterans Day approaches, we remember and honor the selfless sacrifices veterans have made for our nation. There are 9.5 million veterans who are 65 years or older, and 1,500 veterans die every day, in the United States. As veterans from previous wars age and countless national heroes continue to fight for our freedoms, paying for the burial expenses of veterans is a growing concern for many families and state veteran cemeteries. The burial benefits provided to our nation's veterans by the Department of Veterans Affairs have seriously eroded due to inflation, leaving states and families to supplement the cost.

The Veterans Burial Benefits Improvement Act of 2003, H.R. 2217, will correct this oversight by increasing the benefits to cover the same percentage of veterans' burial costs that they covered in 1973 when they were initiated. Specifically, the adjustment will:

- increase the Department of Veterans Affairs plot allowance from \$300 to \$670 for the burial costs of veterans who are buried in a state veteran cemetery or a private cemetery.
- increase burial allowance benefits from \$2,000 to \$3,713 for veterans who die as a result of service connected injuries and are buried in a national cemetery.
- increase the burial allowance for a veteran who is buried in a national veteran cemetery and whose cause of death is not related to military service, from \$300 to \$1,135.

The **AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Veterans of Foreign Wars, National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs** and the **Fleet Reserve Association** (which represents all enlisted personnel in the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps and U.S. Coast Guard), strongly support H.R. 2217.

I encourage you to support this important improvement to veterans benefits. For more information, or to cosponsor H.R. 2217, please contact me or Shannon von Felden at 225-5965.

Sincerely,

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SHELLEY BERKLEY
Member of Congress