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Victory! For NFDA and America's Veterans

On Sunday, December 30, 2012, the House passed by voice vote, S.3202, the "Dignified Burial and Other Veterans Benefits Improvement Act of 2012." The bill now goes to the President for signature.

The bill, which was strongly and actively supported by NFDA, includes several key provisions that NFDA has been working hard to have passed. A summary of those is set forth below. They are:

- 1. Requiring the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to furnish a casket or urn "of such quality as the Secretary considers appropriate for a dignified burial in a national cemetery" for veterans with no next of kin or sufficient resources for the burial are not otherwise available. The casket or urn must be in compliance with appropriate industry standards. This provision is effective one year after enactment;
- 2. With respect to the burial, interment or funeral, memorial service or ceremony of a deceased veteran at a national cemetery, the Secretary shall insure that the expressed wishes of the next of kin or other agent of the deceased veteran are respected and given appropriate deference when evaluating whether the event affects the safety and security of the national cemetery and visitors to the cemetery. This provision is effective from and after enactment;
- 3. The Secretary shall give access to any honor guard unit including those of any VSO or other non-governmental group providing services to the deceased veteran to public areas of a national cemetery if requested by the next of kin or other authorized agent. This provision is effective from and after enactment;
- 4. With respect to each deceased veteran who is transported to a national cemetery for burial, the Secretary shall ensure that the local medical examiner, funeral director, county service group or other entity responsible for the body of the deceased veteran before such transportation submits to the Secretary, (a) whether the deceased was cremated; and, (b) steps taken to ensure that the deceased veteran has no next of kin. [Note: a deceased veteran described in this subsection is one that has no next of kin or other person claiming the body of the deceased veteran; and, who does not have sufficient resources for furnishing a casket or urn.] The Secretary shall pay the funeral expenses and transportation costs for the deceased veteran. This provision takes effect 180 days after enactment
- 5. The Secretary shall cooperate with VSO's to assist entities (Funeral Homes) in possession of unclaimed or abandoned human remains to determine if such remains are those of a veteran or other individual eligible for burial in a national cemetery under the jurisdiction of the Secretary. This provision is effective one-year after enactment.

This is just a quick summary of the key provisions of S. 3202. A more detailed summary will be provided to all NFDA members once the Department of Veterans Affairs has had time to draft implementing regulations. However, suffice it to say; this is a major victory for NFDA and our nation's veterans.