



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
WASHINGTON

May 14, 2007

The Honorable Jim Gerlach  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Gerlach:

Thank you for your letter in which you express your concerns about the timely acquisition of land for the new national cemetery in the Southeastern Pennsylvania area. I regret my delay in replying.

I share your concerns regarding the effect that land acquisition delays would have on the development of this new national cemetery. In order to establish the new national cemetery for veterans in the Southeastern Pennsylvania area at the earliest opportunity, we are pursuing efforts to expedite development in several areas. I have provided additional detail on these efforts in the enclosed Information Sheet. While it is true that we do not yet own the Dolington tract, the preparatory steps outlined in the Information Sheet, in anticipation of ownership, will expedite the development of the cemetery once we do take ownership of the property we seek.

As for the issue of taking ownership of the Dolington tract, I believe that you are aware of the status of the relevant zoning issues, and the expected settlement of a challenge to the zoning variance that will allow VA to continue to move toward ownership of that parcel of land. I continue to believe that VA will succeed in securing the Dolington tract. Under Secretary Tuerk is available to brief you and your staff regarding the status of this acquisition.

I also note that the most recent proposal advanced by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania with regard to the Pennhurst site does not appear to be a positive development. As I understand it, Pennsylvania has reduced the size of the parcel it proposes to sell, and it has raised the proposed price for that site. And while I am pleased to learn from your May 3, 2007, letter to Mr. Tuerk that the Commonwealth remains committed to undertaking necessary demolition work on the site at State expense if VA chooses to locate the cemetery at Pennhurst, the terms expressed in the Commonwealth's most recent proposal are nonetheless decidedly less favorable to VA than those which I considered, and implicitly rejected, earlier when I decided to locate the cemetery at Dolington.

VA remains committed to opening a new national cemetery in Southeastern Pennsylvania as quickly as possible. I have previously stated to you that my patience with the current situation is not unlimited. The ongoing vagaries of the legal situation with respect to Dolington, and the latest offer of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania with respect to the Pennhurst property, are both unsettling developments. In light of that, I have directed that Under Secretary Tuerk undertake a reassessment of the situation, and that he explore what other options – including, but not limited to,

Page 2.

The Honorable Jim Gerlach

development of the Pennhurst site – might be available to VA in the event that the preferred Dolington site is not made available to VA in the near future. Toward that end, Mr. Tuerk has directed that professionals be engaged to assess with more precision the potential costs of and impediments to development of the Pennhurst site, and to explore the potential availability of other sites in Pennsylvania that might accommodate VA's needs. In the interim, we will continue to assist, as we can, in moving with the interested parties toward a transfer of the Dolington tract to VA. However, we will no longer proceed as if that option is the only one that we will consider further.

Thank you for your continued interest in the project to establish a new national cemetery in the Southeastern Pennsylvania area.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. James Nicholson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

R. James Nicholson

Enclosure

**Information Sheet  
Regarding Development of Southeastern Pennsylvania  
New National Cemetery**

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has taken the following steps to expedite development of the new national cemetery:

- We have completed the solicitation and selected the Architect Engineering (AE) firm that will develop the master plan and perform the design effort. VA has retained the AE firm, Cairone & Kaupp, Inc., of Philadelphia to design this new national cemetery.
- We have developed a comprehensive scope of work for the cemetery construction effort and are planning to enter into negotiations with our AE firm for an anticipated master plan and design development award this summer. We met all six of the AE firms here in Washington on March 21, 2007, to jump-start the design process.
- We have planned for a phased design and construction approach to expedite the design and construction on a smaller portion of the planned 10-year development almost 2 years in advance of the completion of the remaining construction work. This early burial development area would allow VA to service area veterans while cemetery infrastructure and additional burial areas continue to be developed.

**National Cemetery Administration  
May 2007**