

# United States Senate

July 2, 2020

The Honorable Randy C. Reeves  
Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs  
National Cemetery Administration  
810 Vermont Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20420

The Honorable William P. Pendley  
Deputy Director  
Bureau of Land Management  
1849 C St, NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Under Secretary Reeves and Deputy Director Pendley:

I write to you today regarding the proposal to create a National Veterans Cemetery in Elko, Nevada, to be managed by the National Cemetery Administration (NCA), under the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), to better serve rural veterans in Nevada and nearby areas, and to request your immediate attention and support in the resolution of any outstanding issues so that the cemetery may be placed in service, as requested by Nevadans.

In 2013, the VA approved the construction of a Federal burial ground in Elko, Nevada, which is located along Interstate 80, midway between Reno, Nevada and Salt Lake City, Utah. As you know, a Federal burial ground is hosted within an existing cemetery. Unfortunately, the existing Elko cemetery was already at near capacity, leading the VA to pursue a land transfer from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in order to accommodate the burial needs of rural veterans. This option has since been reviewed by local BLM and VA officials in Nevada, and has broad support from regional veterans and their families, whose nearest other veterans cemetery burial option is either in Reno or Salt Lake City, both more than 200 miles away.

I strongly believe every veteran deserves the opportunity to choose a cemetery near their home. In response to requests from my constituents, I introduced S. 3492, the Elko National Cemetery Act on March 12, 2020. My legislation would authorize an interagency transfer of Federal land from the BLM to the NCA for use as a national cemetery. Implementation of my bill builds upon the NCA's efforts that began in 2011 when it established the Rural Initiative to improve burial access for veterans residing in rural areas. The Rural Initiative targeted states that lack a national cemetery with available space and focused on areas unserved by national cemetery resources. The Rural Initiative sought to establish a national cemetery presence in rural areas of 8 states where the veteran population is less than 25,000 within a 75-mile radius of proposed National Veterans Burial Ground locations, and specifically identified Elko, Nevada, as an area that met such criteria. To date, this area of my state remains in need of such services.

Additionally, it is important to note that the President's Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Budget Request for the VA includes a legislative authorization request to transfer jurisdiction of land in Elko from the BLM to the VA for the establishment of a burial option. This was the fifth consecutive

budget proposal to include this priority, the first being in FY 2017. My bill would implement this budget proposal. However, the immediate and sustained resources from your agencies are also required to make this cemetery a reality.

Given these facts and the multi-year history of this important project to serve our rural veterans, I respectfully request that the NCA and BLM join me in prioritizing this matter, and to collaboratively work together to bring the creation of the proposed Elko National Cemetery to completion. I am confident that by working together, we can address any concerns and bring this project to fruition for my constituents and for our veterans and their families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Catherine Cortez Masto". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator