

WASHINGTON, DC – House Armed Services Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee Chairman Rob Wittman today stressed the need for results in accountability efforts and investigations relating to the previous mismanagement allegations at Arlington National Cemetery (ANC), during a joint hearing to receive updates on efforts to modernize and fix errors at ANC. Chairman Wittman, along with Military Personnel Subcommittee Chairman Joe Wilson (SC-02), led the joint hearing. Officials from the Army and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) testified on recent reports which were mandated by legislation passed during the 111th Congress.

“Achieving results and resolution on accountability issues, and ensuring Arlington has a strategic plan must remain a top priority,” Wittman said. “The fact that criminal investigations continue, despite the length of time since initial allegations arose in June of 2010, is deeply troubling. Arlington cannot close the door on this terrible chapter until this, and other management challenges, are resolved. We owe it to our fallen heroes to do so as expeditiously as possible. I will continue, along with my colleagues, to exercise oversight authority on these issues because the heroes who do so much for our country deserve nothing less. Further, Chairman Wilson and I will be inquiring with the Army Criminal Investigative Division and Department of Justice as to the current status of investigations, potential legal proceedings and future actions.”

The Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee has spent the last year conducting extensive oversight on contract and management issues associated with Arlington National Cemetery. Specifically, the subcommittee has focused on the framework and decision-making processes that resulted in failure of basic operations at ANC and the lack of accountability efforts while the failures were known. The hearing, part of a series on these issues, will consider whether recent management changes and structural modifications are adequate.

Wittman, along with Chairman Wilson, visited Arlington National Cemetery in 2011. This joint hearing follows the previous joint subcommittee hearing in September 2011, and an Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee hearing in April 2011.

The text of Chairman Wittman's opening statement as prepared for delivery follows:

Welcome. I want to thank my co-chair Joe Wilson, and our ranking members Jim Cooper and Susan Davis, for their steadfast commitment and focus on this very important issue. It's been an honor to work with you over the last months.

I would also like to extend a warm welcome to our panel of witnesses. General, thank you for your service to our Army – we appreciate your leadership and oversight of Arlington;

Ms. Condon, thanks to you and your team, who have met with us on a monthly basis to keep us apprised of progress. I would like to highlight my appreciation for you and the Army leadership who have changed the culture and climate at Arlington.

This was an organization characterized by deficiencies and mismanagement - that has since been transformed into a stable, functioning and professional organization - that is finally setting a new standard for how we care for our fallen heroes.

Mr. Brian Lepore and Ms. Belva Martin, thank you also for coming. The GAO always does an excellent job and we appreciate your service.

We are here today for two very important reasons: to figure out what progress has been made with respect to accountability issues at Arlington and to determine what challenges remain that need to be addressed moving forward.

I have said many times how important it is to me personally that we work to achieve 100% accountability - and the Army has done a great job with helping us get there with the Gravesite Accountability Task Force. Validating almost 200,000 gravesites was difficult and challenging, but you, your staff, and the Old Guard got it done.

However, I remain concerned about a number of issues. First, the lack of accountability with respect to former officials for their misconduct. It's my understanding that no criminal action has been taken and that investigations are ongoing and open. I find this hard to believe, and unacceptable, and I will continue to follow this very closely.

Second, despite the great amount of time that has elapsed since initial allegations came to light, management and contracting issues persist at Arlington. To highlight just a few, I'm concerned about GAO's findings regarding the lack of a strategic plan and the lack of IT organizational architecture which call into question whether we're effectively and efficiently spending taxpayer dollars at the Cemetery when millions of dollars have already been wasted.

I hope the panel will address these issues. I also hope you'll tell us what progress has been made, and when you believe we'll finally have resolution on these matters. We cannot close the door on this terrible chapter in Arlington history until all of these issues are resolved.

We owe it to our Nation's heroes who have sacrificed their lives on our behalf to continue to make this a top priority and to get this done.

And we owe it to future generations of heroes who deserve the honor of being buried there. Thank you.

Congressman Rob Wittman represents the First District of Virginia. He serves on the House Natural Resources Committee and the House Armed Services Committee where he is the Chairman of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee.

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