

Statement by Senator Dianne Feinstein
S. 2881 the Mare Island Naval Cemetery Transfer Act
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
August 1, 2018

Chairman Isakson, Ranking Member Tester and members of the Committee, thank you very much for inviting me here today to discuss my legislation.

S. 2881, the bill I have introduced with several of my colleagues, is straightforward and would transfer control of the Mare Island Naval Cemetery from the City of Vallejo to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

I'd like to briefly provide some background on the history of this cemetery. The Mare Island Naval Cemetery is the oldest military cemetery on the West Coast. The cemetery was part of a U.S. Navy base that closed down in 1993. After the base closed, the nearby City of Vallejo assumed control of the property including the cemetery.

The cemetery has over 900 graves, including over 800 veterans and three Medal of Honor Recipients. There are approximately 80 nonmilitary graves, the majority of which belong to military family members.

Unfortunately, the City of Vallejo didn't have the necessary funds to care for the cemetery, which has only been maintained by volunteers with limited resources. The cemetery is very damaged: gravestones are toppled over, broken or sinking into the ground, serious drainage issues exist, and plants and weeds are overgrown. The current state of the cemetery requires urgent action to restore these graves and the grounds to a respectable condition.

The bill is a simple transfer of the cemetery from the city to the Department of Veterans Affairs. This means that the VA would have the responsibility to restore the cemetery and maintain the grounds in a respectable condition.

I want to thank you all for considering this bill and I want to thank Senators Harris, Markey, Menendez, Warren, Cardin and Booker for cosponsoring this legislation.

We owe our veterans a great deal. By passing this bill we can ensure that the Mare Island Naval Cemetery is restored and maintained to honor our veterans who are buried there. For those veterans and their family members who sacrificed so much for our nation, it is fitting that we do so.

Thank you.