

The Virgin Islands Consortium

VA Office Hoping to Receive \$3.5 Million To Build State Veterans Cemetery on St. Croix; Plan to Build Burial Crypt in the Interim Underway

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War Heroes' Headstones By. GETTY IMAGES

V.I. Office of Veterans Affairs Director Patrick Farrell said during a Friday Senate hearing that the local V.A. office was on schedule to build a burial crypt at the Kingshill Cemetery to accommodate burials for veterans, as the office awaits \$3.5 million in federal funding to build a State Veterans Cemetery on St. Croix. Currently, the section for veteran burials at the Kingshill Cemetery is near capacity.

A burial crypt is a chamber in which the body of a deceased person is placed. These are most often made out of stone, like granite or marble, or from concrete, and they are located below ground but are not filled with earth like a burial.

Mr. Farrel said the local V.A. was close to securing federal dollars for the new facility. In the meantime, once built, the crypt would accommodate additional veteran burials.

"We are very close to the construction of a second crypt on St. Thomas and the first one on St. Croix," he said. "These crypts are our best option until the start of construction for our very first 100 percent federally funded Veterans State Cemetery in the Virgin Islands.

"To date, we have met all requirements of the VA Cemetery Grants Program application process and are patiently awaiting the results of the fiscal year 2022 priority list to be published."

Relative to the capacity issues at the Kingshill Cemetery, Mr. Farrell, in responding to questions from Senator Novelle Francis, stated, "I know your concern is that the present veteran section within the Kingshill Cemetery on St. Croix is just about filled. In the interim, we have identified a place where we can use monies to build a crypt similar to nature as the ones on St. Thomas that takes up less space. We will use that crypt in the interim until we get the V.A. State Cemetery rolling and built."

Asked by Mr. Francis how far along the crypts were, Mr. Farrell said requests for proposal had not gone out but that his financial team would soon be at the Senate seeking funding.

The director said the crypt on St. Croix would be erected "directly west of the current veterans section" that was cleared. "We plan to build the crypt to the farthest northern portion of that section, leaving the rest of that empty space for the V.A. State Cemetery," he said.

Though Mr. Farrell expressed optimism that the local V.A. office would receive the federal funding for the new VA cemetery on St. Croix, he revealed that it was not a certainty. "It's a possibility that we cannot be granted it in this fiscal year" because the funding is based on priority," he said. "The Department of Veterans Affairs is the one that sets the priority."

The local V.A. should have a response by Sept. 15 on whether the territory will be among the recipients, the director said.

Even so, Mr. Farrell stated, "I will tell you that because we have not one V.A. State Cemetery here in the territory, we stand a very good chance of receiving those funds this fiscal year."

Senator Marvin Blyden sought to learn whether the crypt on St. Croix would be federally funded. The director said crypts are separate from the V.A. State Cemetery program and are to be funded with local dollars.

Asked by Senator Milton Potter whether each district would get a state cemetery, the director responded, "The plan is to have the very first one on the island of St. Croix and then when that one is completed, we will move on to the St. Thomas-St. John district and

have one in this district as well.”

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