POSITION DESCRIPTION

**Undersecretary for memorial affairs, Department of veterans affairs**

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| **OVERVIEW** |
| Senate Committee | Veterans’ Affairs |
| Agency Mission | To fulfill President Lincoln’s promise “to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan” by serving and honoring the men and women who are America’s veterans |
| Position Overview | The undersecretary for memorial affairs is responsible for the development and implementation of policies and programs associated with veterans interment and memorialization benefits and for ensuring future burial needs are met. |
| Compensation | Level III $165,300 (5 U.S.C. § 5314)[[1]](#endnote-1) |
| Position Reports to | Secretary of Veterans Affairs[[2]](#endnote-2) |
| **RESPONSIBILITIES** |
| Management Scope | In 2017, the undersecretary for memorial affairs oversaw a budget of more than $286 million for the Veterans Affairs cemetery system of 135 national cemeteries and more than 1,800 employees.[[3]](#endnote-3) The Department of Veterans Affairs’ budget for fiscal 2018 is over $185 billion. The undersecretary directly supervises the principal deputy undersecretary and the chief of staff. |
| Primary Responsibilities | * Leads and directs the National Cemetery Administration (NCA), which provides dignified burial services for military veterans and eligible family members
* Oversees memorial programs to honor the service of deceased veterans, and serves as the principal advisor to the secretary on:
	+ Acquisition, construction and maintenance of national cemeteries
	+ Burial eligibility
	+ Provisions of headstone and markers, presidential memorial certificates and state cemetery grants programs
	+ Outreach, partnerships and digital memorialization efforts
* Responsible for the operation and maintenance of the cemeteries to support and encourage high-level customer service standards, including courtesy, easy gravesite and benefit access, prompt delivery of service and benefits, accuracy and cemetery appearance befitting a national shrine
* Represents the department on matters relating to memorial entitlements programs in accordance with the secretary’s priorities, goals and objectives[[4]](#endnote-4)
* Communicates NCA’s vision, principles, goals, expectations and outcomes to the Office of the Secretary, other department officials, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), Congress, the Government Accountability Office (GAO), veterans, veteran service organizations and other federal agencies and stakeholders
* Develops long-range plans and policies that impact NCA’s long-term direction and strategy
* Provides briefings, speeches, congressional testimony and high-level presentations on veteran interment and memorialization programs
* Establishes committees, advisory groups and review bodies, as necessary, to provide information[[5]](#endnote-5)
* Administers federal grants to help states, territories and tribal governments establish veterans cemeteries[[6]](#endnote-6)
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| Strategic Goals and Priorities | [Depends on the policy priorities of the administration] |
| **REQUIREMENTS AND COMPETENCIES** |
| Requirements | * Strong understanding of, and relationships with, Congress
* Understanding of the missions and purpose of the VA and the NCA, the major national veteran service organizations and national military service organizations
* Understanding of joint Veterans Affairs-Department of Defense veteran-related programs and collaborations pertaining to cemetery and internment services
* Extensive experience managing complex, bureaucratic organizations
* Understanding of the sensitive cultural setting within which NCA operates
* Veteran status (highly preferred)[[7]](#endnote-7)
* Awareness of the legislative issues impacting the agency
* Experience forming and sustaining extra-governmental partnerships and coalitions
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| Competencies | * Excellent leadership, management and negotiation skills
* High degree of discretion and political sensitivity
* Strength in change management
* Strong ability to advocate to direct reports and the secretary, to directly engage and motivate employees at all levels and to communicate effectiveness and sensitivity with all stakeholders, including the bereaved
* Strong public-speaking skills
* Particularly strong ability to interact effectively and persuasively with local political entities (for example, local land-use authorities) and local advocacy groups (for example, environmental groups)
* Ability to be a strong and persuasive advocate for the VA to external audiences, and for the NCA to the Office of the Secretary, other department officials, OMB, Congress, GAO, veterans, veteran service organizations and other federal agencies and stakeholders
* Deep appreciation and recognition of the service and sacrifice of veterans
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| **CURRENT AND PAST APPOINTEES** |
| Randy Reeves (2017 – Present): Executive Director, Mississippi Veterans Affairs Board; President, National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs; Director of the Mississippi Veterans Memorial Cemetery; Officer, United States Navy[[8]](#endnote-8) |
| Steve L. Muro (2011 to 2014): Deputy Undersecretary for Memorial Affairs, Department of Veterans Affairs; Director of the Office of Field Programs, Department of Veterans Affairs; Director, Memorial Service Network[[9]](#endnote-9) |
| William F. Tuerk (2005 to 2009): General Counsel, Chief Counsel and Staff Director (progressively), Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs; Legal Staff, Veterans Affairs Office of General Counsel; Practicing Attorney specializing in Petroleum Regulation, the Environment and Aviation[[10]](#endnote-10) |
| John W. “Jack” Nicholson (2003 to 2005): Federal Executive Fellow, Brookings Institution[[11]](#endnote-11); President Reagan Appointee to Strategic Arms Negotiations in Geneva, Switzerland; Airborne Ranger Combat Infantryman, United States Army[[12]](#endnote-12) |

1. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017 (Public Law 115-31, May 5, 2017), contains a provision that continues the freeze on the payable pay rates for certain senior political officials at 2013 levels during calendar year 2017. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Romney Readiness Project position description [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Romney Readiness Project position description [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. OPM [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Romney Readiness Project position description [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. <https://www.va.gov/opa/bios/bio_walters.asp> [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Romney Readiness Project position description [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. <https://www.va.gov/opa/bios/bio_reeves.asp> [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. <https://www.va.gov/opa/bios/bio_muro.asp> [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. <http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/history/frmrleads4.asp> [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. VA News Release 2003 [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. <http://www.cem.va.gov/history/frmrleads4.asp> [↑](#endnote-ref-12)