

Governor Susana Martinez
Office of the Governor
490 Old Santa Fe Trail, Room 400
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501

Dear Governor Martinez:

I ask that you select the site proposed by the Village of Angel Fire adjacent to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial under your state veterans' cemetery initiative.

The Memorial is a national treasure that has had an enormous influence on thousands of veterans and deserves to be given the honor of being the final resting place for veterans well into the future. The Memorial will add tremendous spiritual, healing, and inspirational value to a veterans' cemetery. No other location in our state stands as such hallowed ground to so many from all military branches and periods of service. Veterans and their family members would cherish the opportunity to see their veteran loved ones able to share their final spiritual home with other brothers and sisters who are already honored at the Memorial and for whom this special place truly represents our "coming home" like no other spot on earth.

Beyond these deep spiritual reasons, the Angel Fire location stands above others as a center of veteran activity, a strong community support infrastructure that already exists, and because an offer of land far beyond the minimum requirement of the initiative will serve far more veterans than other proposals.

Numerous events are held in Angel Fire and at the Memorial every year to honor veterans. The annual Run for the Wall each May draws hundreds of visitors who pay their respects enroute to the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial in Washington, DC. Memorial Day ceremonies always attract many dignitaries and large numbers of visitors. Labor Day weekend is a major event featuring the annual brick laying ceremony and other activities. Annual visitor counts for the Memorial are approximately 50,000. What other proposed cemetery site can promise so many people to honor veterans before construction even begins? Building a state veterans' cemetery next to the Memorial will greatly enhance the value of the State-owned Memorial State Park by increasing its visibility and impact. The Memorial is already a regional and even national resource that will likely increase the use of an Angel Fire cemetery particularly in view of the increasing frequency of cremation of veteran's remains.

The Angel Fire area provides extraordinary support to existing veteran programs and is prepared to immediately support a cemetery. The David Westphall Veterans Foundation, along with local government entities, has pledged its full support to creation of a state veterans' cemetery in Angel Fire adjacent to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial State Park. In keeping with its mission to support veterans, the David Westphall Veterans Foundation would support the cemetery by publicizing its existence and by encouraging veterans to utilize it as a final resting place. The Foundation has a strong cadre of volunteers and a loyal following that it would encourage to support the cemetery and its programs as a logical complement to the Memorial. In addition, Angel Fire is the home to the National Veterans Wellness and Healing Center; the only program to offer treatment to both veterans and spouses and a nationally recognized program. Beyond Angel Fire, the communities of Eagle Nest, Red River, Cimarron, and Raton all participate and support activities related to veterans and the Memorial. Businesses and citizens in all of these communities provide free meals, fuel, and lodging for numerous veteran events.

Private landowners have generously offered to donate significant land for a veterans' cemetery adjacent to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial State Park. Acreage could be made available that would provide the State Parks and Veterans Services agencies an unprecedented opportunity to design a comprehensive veterans facility that would serve us decades into the future. The service area for a veterans' cemetery at Angel Fire would include approximately 10,000 veterans and it is projected that there would be at least 60 burials annually at the Angel Fire site. Angel Fire is very well suited geographically to serve the burial needs of veterans residing in north central and northeast New Mexico. Further, the large acreage being offered for this proposal allows an Angel Fire cemetery service region that could extend into southern Colorado and other nearby states if desired. Finally, the service area of a veterans' cemetery at Angel Fire would greatly expand when the Santa Fe National Cemetery becomes closed to new burials within about ten years. No other proposal offers as much land to make this alternative possible.

In closing, creation of a veterans' cemetery at Angel Fire was an unfulfilled goal of Dr. Victor Westphall, the founder of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial at Angel Fire. "Doc" Westphall was a friend to all veterans as few ever have been. A cemetery next to his resting place will be welcomed by veterans themselves more than any other site we know. Please create a cemetery in the best interests of veterans and not based on some other criteria.

Respectfully,

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