

Good morning, Chairman Vigesaa and members of the House Appropriations Committee.

My name is Austen Schauer, District 13, West Fargo.

Today, I bring you **Senate Bill 2265** designed to support our veterans' families when the end arrives.

**SB 2265** will provide the National Veterans Cemetery in Fargo with a line of credit of up to \$3 million. These funds will be used to improve and enhance the cemetery grounds.

Since its dedication in **2019**, the Fargo National Cemetery has expanded from five to 35 acres.

The Honor Guard has laid more than one thousand veterans to rest and now with expansion, the cemetery has room for another 32 hundred burials.

However, the Cemetery lacks important facilities.

- **It does not have a gathering area for family and friends to meet before and after interment.**
- **It does not have indoor bathrooms. Current facilities consist of a vault toilet that freezes in the winter and a port-a-potty.**
- **It does not have adequate parking, forcing families to park on Country Road 20 with traffic speeds of 60 mph or greater, which is a traffic hazard.**
- **It does not have a gallery honoring veterans and showcasing their service.**
- **It does not have a garage for a hearse, ensuring proper funeral service operations.**
- **It does not have an office for VA and Honor Guard staff to assist families and manage cemetery operations.**

The Fargo Honor Guard accepts all funeral requests which a noble commitment. However, given the lack of indoor facilities, Honor Guard members, volunteers, and family members must endure harsh weather conditions during services which often involves older people.

We can do better.

The Fargo Memorial Honor Guard presented a detailed plan for improving facilities to our GVA Committee with an estimated cost of \$5 million.

The Guard has raised \$1.4 million and now seeks a line of credit for \$3 million dollars.

The funds would be available from July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2027. Should these dollars be accessed, a deficiency appropriation will be requested.

The VA must approve the project before State dollars can be used. After the project is completed, the VA will take ownership of the cemetery with all necessary upkeep.

**SB 2265** has received strong support from Senator Hoeven who is working behind the scenes to move this project forward.

City and community leaders from Fargo, West Fargo, and nearby Harwood are in full support along with Cass County legislators.

The goal is to bring the Fargo National Cemetery to the same high standard as the North Dakota State Veterans Cemetery in Mandan.

That is a high bar, but attainable when we work together to achieve it.

Let us, "**Lay to rest with proper honor, dignity, and respect for the remains of our fallen comrade**" which is the Mission Statement of the Fargo Honor Guard.

Mr. Chairman, Committee members, we seek your support of **SB 2265**.

Thank you.