

Testimony by Jim Graalum

Fargo Memorial Honor Guard

As a veteran, former officer in both the National Guard and Reserves, and current Fargo Memorial Honor Guard member, I am presenting my testimony to the Appropriations Committee to provide detailed information regarding the Veterans Memorial Center at the Fargo National Cemetery. My title is Project Coordinator, which means “jack of all trades.” My primary responsibility is to raise funds for the Veterans Memorial Center.

My name will be inscribed at the cemetery on two occasions: once on my headstone and again on the donation I made to the building project.

But this building project is more than Jason Hicks or myself, we may be the face and voice of the project, but it is more for the widows and family members who must endure the harsh weather during the interment of their loved one. It’s for the parent who visits their son's or daughter’s grave site and reads a book as they sit alone or for families of deceased veterans, providing a place where they can reminisce with friends and pay their final respects in a comfortable setting.

Since the opening of the Fargo National Cemetery in the fall of 2019, the absence of a building has emerged as a primary concern that requires attention. Despite adverse weather conditions, the Fargo Memorial Honor Guard performs the Final Military Honors throughout the year. Whether it's rain, snow, heat, or cold, the Fargo Memorial Honor Guard consistently supports the family of the deceased veteran with their dedicated presence.

The Fargo National Cemetery provides services to North Dakota, Western Minnesota, and Northeast South Dakota. It is the sole Federal Cemetery between Fort Snelling National Cemetery, Black Hills National Cemetery in South Dakota, and Yellowstone National Cemetery in Montana.

7 April 2025

We have received over 790 donations from donors, including Foundations, businesses, service organizations, social clubs, fraternal groups, and individuals throughout North Dakota and western Minnesota, encompassing areas from Kenmare to New Salem, Wahpeton, and Cavalier. Currently, we have 303 donors who have contributed at least \$500 each. These contributors recognize the significance of the Veterans Memorial Center initiative, which seeks to create a serene and welcoming environment for families and friends to honor and remember our fallen comrades.

I plan to submit two letters of support from Native American Veterans: Wayne Wermager, a member of the Chippewa Tribe from White Earth, Minnesota, and Scott Satermo, a member of the Three Affiliated Tribes from New Town, North Dakota. I have also spoken with Harriet Good Iron, Mandaree, North Dakota, and Gold Star Mother whose son, Nathaniel, a member of the North Dakota Guard 188th Air Defense, was killed in action on November 23, 2006. She has expressed her intention to donate one of his uniforms for display in the gallery. Additionally, I will include a handwritten note from Lucinda Halvorson, who has generously donated \$5,000 to the building fund.

This project aims to enhance the Fargo National Cemetery by constructing a facility that will provide shelter from the weather, a chapel, a gathering space, a gallery, restrooms, and a parking lot.

For these reasons, I am requesting assistance from the North Dakota Legislators in securing funding to support the construction of the Veterans Memorial Center at the Fargo National Cemetery. Thank you for considering funding this vital project for the Veterans and their families.



James Graalum