

**DON YOUNG**  
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Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

COMMITTEE ON  
NATURAL RESOURCES  
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ALASKA NATIVE AFFAIRS  
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TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE  
REPUBLICAN  
POLICY COMMITTEE

March 29, 2016

The Honorable Robert McDonald  
Secretary  
United States Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald,

Thank you for your continued service as Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for taking the time to visit the State of Alaska last August. Alaska is a unique State, and faces many unique challenges. I would like to raise two of these unique challenges to your attention with this letter.

During your visit to Alaska, you had the opportunity to meet and recognize living members of the Alaska Territorial Guard (ATG), a force of predominantly Alaska Native Soldiers who volunteered to protect Alaska's coastline from foreign incursion during World War II. You also graciously paid tribute to two fallen members of the ATG in the small whaling community of Point Hope.

While you were in the Point Hope cemetery, you may have noticed that all of the graves are marked with wooden crosses. As you walked further back in the cemetery, you may have also noticed how decades of harsh weather has destroyed many of these wooden markers.

The current VA policy is to provide permanent markers (marble, granite, etc.) to the families of any Veteran who passed away after November 1990, but only for Veterans with unmarked graves who died prior to 1990. Many families of ATG members who died prior to 1990 have submitted applications for permanent headstones, but have been denied because they indicated that the graves are "currently marked" with these wooden markers.

However, since the Civil War, wooden markers have not been considered adequate permanent markers for the graves of Veterans. Therefore, I urge you to

update this policy to recognize the impermanence and inadequate nature of these current wooden markers, and to ensure those who willingly stepped forward to defend the United States are appropriately recognized with true, permanent VA-provided headstones.

Furthermore, as the headstone application requires the social security number for the deceased, and some members of the ATG were never issued a Social Security Number before their passing, their headstone applications were denied to no fault of their own. This is a small number of Veterans, who likely died within several years of the war, but they are still due the proper respect as all of those who serve our great nation. Please make an exception to this requirement for ATG members who lived in remote parts of Alaska and died before they were issued a Social Security Number.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Don Young". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

DON YOUNG  
Congressman for All Alaska