

OMAHA WORLD HERALD

Sarpy County could become home to a national cemetery for military veterans under legislation proposed by Nebraska's congressional delegation.

U.S. Rep. Lee Terry, a Republican, used Memorial Day to announce the bill, which he introduced last week.

Terry noted that few of Nebraska's troops killed in Iraq and Afghanistan are buried in a national cemetery.

One reason might be the distance to the nearest national cemetery. Fort McPherson National Cemetery in Maxwell, Neb., is more than 200 miles west of Omaha, Terry said.

Families in western Iowa also might find a Sarpy County location a better option than their nearest national cemetery, which is east of Des Moines, he said.

Backers of the national cemetery said they have a site in mind - more than 120 acres of rolling hills near Offutt Air Force Base. They envision a cemetery and memorial. The design would have to be worked out with the state.

Terry was optimistic that the federally funded cemetery would become reality. The main stumbling point is the number of veterans living within 75 miles of the Omaha metropolitan area.

Federal officials estimate there are 140,000 vets here, too few to generally allow the area to be designated as a national cemetery site, Terry said. But local officials have data putting the number of vets above 170,000, more than enough to qualify.

Terry said he and other delegates are working to convince federal authorities that the higher number is accurate.

If that doesn't happen, Terry said, there still is a good chance Sarpy County would get its cemetery. An area in Colorado with even fewer vets recently was

designated as a national cemetery site, he said.

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