

At a press conference Monday at Memorial Park in Omaha, Rep. Lee Terry (R) announced he had introduced legislation last week that would bring a national veterans cemetery to Sarpy County.

A Bellevue site northeast of 36th Street and Highway 370 has been proposed for the cemetery.

Terry said a national veterans cemetery in Sarpy County comes with the endorsement of numerous veterans organizations as well as the Nebraska delegation of Terry, Sen. Ben Nelson (D), Sen. Chuck Hagel, Rep. Jeff Fortenberry (R), Rep. Adrian Smith (R) and Iowa Rep. Steve King (R).

Fortenberry, Smith and King are co-sponsoring the measure with Terry.

"I can't tell you how many times people have told me they wish they could be buried in a national veterans cemetery," Terry said.

Former Nebraska State Sen. Paul Hartnett, who has been working on this project for the last four years, was on hand for the announcement.

"I really appreciate the efforts of Lee Terry on behalf of Sarpy County and all of our veterans," Hartnett said.

Terry said one of the criteria necessary to establish a national veterans cemetery is that 175,000 veterans live within a 75-mile radius of the proposed cemetery. The national Veterans Affairs office reports about 140,000 veterans in the target area, while Terry said the number is closer to 173,000.

"We're working to update the Veterans Affairs office numbers," Terry said.

Terry said the Veterans Affairs office recently approved a national veterans cemetery in Colorado with fewer numbers than Nebraska reports.

"So we know it can be done," he said.

Terry said he expects the legislation to be passed by the end of the year. At that time, the process will come to the state level and work with local veterans organizations to gain a better understanding of the cemetery they envision. Terry said he anticipates seeing a design within a year after the legislation is passed.

This is not the first time Bellevue and Sarpy County have heard rumors of a veterans cemetery being started here. Terry said this time though, he is confident it will come to fruition.

"There are three reasons," he said. "One, we are rated very high on the list for a national cemetery; two, they have already passed one (the Colorado site) that represents a smaller pool than what we have here; and three, our entire delegation is involved and so there will be pressure from both sides of the Capitol."

The size of the cemetery has not yet been determined. Terry said 100 percent of the funding for the cemetery will come from the federal government.

"This won't just be a cemetery," he said. "This will be a memorial to all who have died."

