

Monument Stakeholders:

By now you may have read the January 14, 2025 change to the “El Dorado County Veterans Monument Criteria for Military Honoraria and Civilian Recognition”. HHSa will submit the document to the BOS for approval.

History:

In our opinion the document is clearly not a product of positive change by due process. The stated purpose of the latest policy document iteration is; “To bring the veterans community together as a whole and incorporate their feedback.” In fact, the veterans community has never been divided. Like essentially all Americans, we believe that our freedom cannot be sustained without respect for policy and law that no one is above. The start of many policy proposal iterations occurred in June/July 2021. After realizing that they had been duped into thinking that the founder of the monument did not wish to proportionately honor exemplary humanitarian service in the monument, the majority of commanders of our county’s federally certified veterans organizations wrote letters to the BOS requesting that the policy prohibiting the mounting of plaques for non-military cross or medal of honor recipients on the honor wall be enforced. In a subsequent hearing the BOS was similarly misled and consequently allowed a private contractor in one of 3,144 counties to determine the equivalency of the nations top two awards for valor ordinarily determined by the individual services and approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Congress and the President and Commander in Chief. Almost any informed American, veteran or not, would be aghast at the delegation of such authority to a private organization who claims themselves to be the sole authority for such decisions. The 2007 policy and ordinance were created by a committee of elected officials, staff and veterans to create a balance between civilian authority and veterans culture. Veteran culture is not a local thing. The principles of “duty, honor, country, service above self, and the other service-related codes are ingrained into American veterans everywhere. They are the reasons that veterans like Sal Gigante walked off a landing craft ramp into a hail of bullets or the founder of the monument Richard Buchanan single handedly attacked an enemy bunker and moved into a fire-swept area to move his marine brothers to safety. Local initiatives for honoraria by rank, equivalence of valor awards, non-veteran eligibility and disrespect for policy and law are the antithesis of national veterans culture. Private people or groups who advocate for such things should not be encouraged to draft policy recommendations governing the EDC Veterans Monument.

We believe that veterans need to come together with a unified response to the January 14 policy proposal that makes two basic points:

- A. No policy or ordinance has value unless it can be enforced, and violators will experience consequences. Unfortunately, multiple violations of 2007 protocol have occurred with no consequence.

B. Violators have been asked to propose changes that cover up and rationalize self-serving goals while misleading the BOS, the EDC community and beyond.

Due Process:

“Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future” John F. Kennedy June 25, 1963. County ordinance 4743 mistakenly allows the “country’s” veterans’ to be honored in the monument instead of the “County’s” veterans.

Eligibility:

There are approximately 18 million living and 33 million dead American veterans. There are about 12 thousand living and 22 thousand dead El Dorado County veterans. Almost 3,000 have service-connected disabilities. The portion of EDC’s 34 thousand veterans that would apply to be recognized in the monument is a function of price, prestige and marketing acumen. By example, the individual cost of recognition in the Vietnam veterans monument is wholly government subsidized so no marketing is needed and every one of the approximately 58,000 who died because of the Vietnam conflict is recognized. We believe that the EDC cost of a brick is not excessive and 34 thousand is beyond capacity. But after 17 years we have only about 2,100 honoraria. We have a marketing problem, not a cost problem and do not need to reduce prestige by expanding eligibility as described in the proposal dated January 14, 2025. Accordingly, ordinance 4743 should be corrected by simply changing the word country to county. Policy should limit eligibility to EDC veterans defined by federal code. About half of the last tranche of bricks were awarded to individuals who never lived in EDC. This practice should stop immediately.

Proportionality:

The September 11, 2007 criteria intended to honor veterans “proportional to their in-service contributions.” Accordingly, the honor wall was selected as a location to place awards for the nations top two military awards. Although criteria prohibited the mounting of lesser awards after September 11, 2007, several plaques had already been attached and more were destined to ignore policy in the future. The top two military awards are the medal of honor and the military services crosses. There are distinct versions of individual military services in each category. But each medal is awarded by Congress and/or the President and commander in Chief of the United States. To distinguish the proportionality of their importance to veterans culture the Medal of Honor is worn by silk ribbon around the neck. Military cross awards are worn on the top left of all other medals or uniform ribbons. Unfortunately, on November 11, 2022, five of El Dorado county’s military cross awardees were scattered among the potpourri of plaques previously mounted on the honor wall making the concept of proportionality a non sequitur. While several solutions have been proposed, all have been unilaterally

discarded by The Veteran Alliance. We are left with a desecration, not only because of misplaced military cross plaques, but many other details.

Broad Solutions:

In our view no private contractor or individual should be afforded the unilateral authority to usurp the principles of national military culture. A committee of the Commanders of the Federally appointed veterans organizations should be reappointed to recommend methods of restoring the monument to its intended purpose consistent with the 2007 Criteria. No politically appointed commissioners or contractors should be included. The VSO, delegated at least a dotted line reporting authority, should be the arbiter subject to final approval of the BOS. The "private citizens, civic organizations, and arbitrary military/veterans organizations included in the 1/14/25 proposal should not be a change element of the criteria. Management of the Monument is already factious enough. Citizens have access to the Grand Jury, the courts and the ballot box. The purpose of monument policy was to facilitate veteran influence without violating the nondelegation protocol of the constitution. Further dilution of subjective influence delegated to EDC veterans is problematic. By experience these last few years many of the source contributors of the 1/14/25 proposal do not have adequate objectivity to draft and administer any complex policy and they consistently act to unilaterally violate policy and the precepts of American veteran culture. HHSA is requested to recommend enforcement of 2007 ordinance and policy and see to it that a committee of veterans, other than the violators of policy, draft changes, if any, that they think might be appropriate. The Veterans Alliance should play no part in this process and County Counsel and the BOS should administer consequences for their intransigence.

Respectfully:

Ken Schoniger
Sal Gigante
Eric Nelson
James Cahil
Charles Sweet
Allen Amaro
Bob Hanisee
Dawn Wolfson
Etc.