

Wednesday, November 6, 1963

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

From the office of
Rep. Robert Dole
244 House Office Building
CApitol 4-3121, x 2715

Rep. Robert Dole (R. of Kans.) today attacked the mailing of Presidentially-signed memorial certificates to the survivors of deceased veterans as an attempt to play on the emotions of a veteran's loved ones for political gain and "in extremely poor taste".

The practice recently was disclosed by a Tennessee newspaper (The Knoxville Journal) which reported that many residents there were angered.

In a statement for the Congressional Record, Dole pointed out that through a cooperative arrangement between the White House and the Veterans Administration, a certificate bearing the signature of President Kennedy is mailed to the next of kin upon the death of a veteran. The certificate commends the deceased for service to mankind.

Dole disclosed that the certificates are even being sent to survivors of Civil War and Indian Wars veterans as well as to the next of kin of recently deceased veterans.

In addition to the certificates, some 1.2 million order blanks are being mailed this fiscal year by the Veterans Administration to veterans' survivors soliciting requests for the certificates. Dole said the cost of the certificates alone amounted to \$60,000 last fiscal year, and much more will be spent during the current fiscal year, although the communications give the impression that the expense is borne by the President from personal funds. He said the \$60,000 would pay one year's compensation to 20 totally disabled service connected veterans; educational benefits for one year for 45 children of veterans killed in action, or a year's death benefits for 38 widows of men who died in service, or a variety of other benefits.

In a letter of instruction to managers of Veterans Administration Regional Offices, the VA says:

"I know I can count on your full support and that, recognizing the significance of the President's program, you will exert every effort to insure the utmost accuracy in the Program, not only in furnishing the full and correct name of the veteran, but the correct name and address of the next of kin entitled to the Certificates."

"Just what is the significance of the President's program?", Dole asked. "Could (the VA) possibly mean the political significance of this program? I rather think so."

Dole said the Presidential certificates may appear to be "a nice gesture to a bereaved mother or widow ... , but ... playing as it does upon the emotions of a veteran's loved ones, (it) is in extremely poor taste and quite objectionable and unnecessary."

Dole emphasized that he spoke as a veteran, twice wounded and twice decorated in World War II who spent 39 months in Army hospitals.

Dole said the project "seems to be a part of a pattern -- a pattern in which the taxpayers' money ... is being used to advance the political fortunes of the present Administration." He recalled that shortly after President Kennedy took office, the Veterans Administration announced early payment of the 1961 Government Service Life Insurance policies dividend and included with the dividend check an "important notice" of which the first sentence read: "The VA is paying ahead of schedule the 1961 dividend ... as part of the President's program for advancing the economy."

"The propriety of advertising the President's program in this manner at the taxpayers' expense is questionable," Dole commented. Dole pointed out that a major service organization (Veterans of Foreign Wars) has the motto "Honor the Dead - By Helping the Living".

Dole concluded that the "finest memorial that a grateful nation can provide in recognizing devoted and selfless service is a sound structure of veterans benefits."

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