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From the offices of
Reps. Bob Dole (R. of Kans.)
and Samuel Devine (R. of Ohio)
House Office Building
Washington 25, D.C.

Two Republican Congressmen said today that the General Accounting Office had ruled as illegal a Johnson Administration program under which the President sends signed memorial certificates to survivors of deceased veterans.

Reps. Bob Dole of Kansas and Samuel L. Devine of Ohio said Comptroller General Joseph Campbell had advised the Administration to either stop the program or come to Congress for statutory authority to continue it.

In a joint statement, the two Congressmen suggested that the money be used to improve benefits for the bereaved as well as improving service to living veterans.

"The finest memorial that a grateful nation can provide in recognizing devoted and selfless service is a sound structure of veterans' benefits," they declared.

The GOP House members pointed out that Comptroller General Campbell had advised them in a 26-page report on May 19 that the veterans' certificate program "does not appear to be either directly or indirectly authorized by law" yet has already cost more than \$160,000 and could cost as much as \$4.5 million.

Campbell's opinion was requested by Dole last year in the belief that what he called an "obviously politically-motivated" program was illegal.

"In view of the fact that there is not a shred of legal authority for this program," Dole and Devine said, referring to the GAO ruling, "the Veterans Administration should bring it to a close."

They added: "The \$160,000 already illegally spent would have paid a year's compensation to some 50 fully disabled veterans, or provided educational benefits for one year for more than 120 children of veterans killed in action or a year's death benefits for about 180 widows of men who died in service, or a variety of other benefits."

The memorial certificate program was started in March, 1962, and at first was limited to those veterans whose deaths were reported to the VA in that month. Since April, 1962 the program has been expanded to include veterans of World Wars I and II, peacetime veterans who died prior to March, 1962, and Civil War veterans. Besides next of kin, memorial certificates may be sent to other relatives and friends of deceased veterans upon request, regardless of whether the veteran served during a period of war.

Campbell reported that the program requires the equivalent of 28 full-time Veterans Administration employees earning a combined \$119,000 annually.

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