

BIRMINGHAM – Congressman Spencer Bachus (AL-6) said a major milestone was reached today towards the construction of a National Veterans Cemetery in Montevallo with an \$8 million purchase of land for the site by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

The VA finalized its acquisition of 479 acres for the cemetery, which will be located next to the picturesque American Village in Shelby County. The land purchase keeps the cemetery project on track to open for its first burials in the fall of 2008.

"This keeps a promise we made to veterans in Alabama and their loved ones, that there will be a fitting final resting place for those who have served our state and country with such honor. It has been a pleasure to work with the VA, our veterans groups in Alabama, Shelby County officials, and Tom Walker of the American Village to see this project through to this important point. As construction begins, I think everyone will see how beautiful a site this is. It will truly show the appreciation we have for the veterans who have defended our freedom," Bachus said.

Bachus worked to have \$18.5 million for the cemetery project included in President Bush's budget request for Fiscal Year 2008.

With the land purchase completed, the VA has awarded a contract for field testing and topographic work that will lead to a final design for the cemetery. A full design contract is expected to be awarded in the fall, and actual construction is projected to begin in the spring of 2008.

According to the VA, the first phase of the project will provide 9,100 full casket gravesites, a 2,700 unit columbarium, and 3,100 in-ground spaces for cremated remains. The acreage at the cemetery will accommodate burials for 40 to 50 years.

The executive director of the American Village, Tom Walker, said, "We are extremely excited with this development, and especially grateful to Congressman Bachus for his leadership in getting a cemetery specifically next to the American Village where so many people learn the vital lessons of liberty. We enjoy freedom only because of the sacrifices that our veterans have made, so this will become sacred ground for all of us. We're happy to have been part of the

discussions with the VA and Congressman Bachus to honor American heroes here in Montevallo."

In 2003, Congress directed the VA to establish a new cemetery in the Birmingham area, which has a population of more than 210,000 veterans who do not have access to a burial option in a national cemetery.