

Briefly...

■ Murphy's Politics

This year's SSA Foundation Forum speaker is Michael Murphy, September 8 in Las Vegas. Murphy is one of the Republican Party's most successful political strategists and consultants. Murphy has been called a "media master" by FORTUNE magazine, is a contributing editor at TIME magazine where he writes the widely followed "Murphy's Law" political column, and is a regular roundtable guest on *Meet the Press* with David Gregory. See page 35 for the full SSA Fall Conference & Trade Show program.

■ Data Partner

The SSA has entered into an agreement with New York-based REIS, Inc., aggregators of commercial real estate data and analysis. The company provides monthly updated trends and forecasts of rent, vacancy and inventory for apartment, office, retail and industrial properties in up to 200 metropolitan areas and more than 1,800 submarkets/neighborhoods. In partnering with the SSA, REIS will offer insight into the self storage industry as never before. More information will be available about the SSA's new data offerings this fall.



Arlington Cemetery Records Found in Self Storage

A quick-thinking manager of a self storage property in Northern Virginia has helped to avert a situation that could easily have deteriorated into a public relations and regulatory conundrum for the industry. Boxes of Arlington National Cemetery (ANC) burial records that contained personal information of thousands of deceased were left in a rental unit being prepared for auction. The incident, made public in June during a House Veterans Affairs Committee hearing on Capitol Hill, highlighted an issue that has garnered increasing attention within self storage circles recently: how to adequately dispose of sensitive and abandoned property without exposing the storage operator to liabilities.

The June 10 discovery of the records rankled the representatives sitting on the House Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs subcommittee, which had spent months grilling Army officials about other continued problems at the nation's military cemetery. ANC officials confirmed that a total of 69 boxes were recovered, which included documents such as copies of grave cards, and other records directly related to the interment of veterans. The Army's Criminal Investigation Division is now leading the investigation into why and how the boxes were moved and found outside of cemetery's grounds. Subcommittee Chairman Jon Runyan described himself as "less than pleased with the lack of follow-up and public disclosure" by the Army.

The records, containing social security numbers and other information, may never have been discovered if it were not for the storage manager who took note of the labels and contacted cemetery officials. Government officials would not release the name of the self storage business where the documents were found and said they had tracked the source of the boxes to a contractor hired by the government to digitize records.

Rep. Bill Johnson (R-Ohio), who sits on the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, said he found it "extremely troubling that boxes containing this kind of information were left unsecured and only discovered allegedly due to a lack of payment for the use of a storage facility. I take this breach very seriously."

Although officials indicated that information about the deceased was unlikely to be used improperly, the situation brought attention to the self storage industry and privacy concerns in the event that records are abandoned. The SSA has backed successful legislative efforts to protect storage businesses from liability when they become involuntary recipients of items such as personal information, weapons or pharmaceuticals.

"I applaud the efforts made by the storage manager in this case," said SSA's general counsel, Carlos Kaslow. "Had the records not been identified as possibly containing sensitive information and turned them over to the proper authorities, the Congressional Hearings might well have targeted our industry, as opposed to the Army and its contractor, the ultimate source of the problem." ♦