

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0530

HENRY A. WAXMAN
30TH DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

October 7, 2005

The Honorable R. James Nicholson
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20420-0002

Dear Secretary Nicholson:

We are writing to express our interest in the Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) Business Plan Studies for the West Los Angeles VA. We understand that you will be determining which options to further study in the weeks ahead. As you make your decision, we urge you to follow the six guiding principles that were unanimously adopted by the CARES Local Advisory Panel at the second public meeting on September 22, 2005 at the Wadsworth Theater at the West Los Angeles VA.

As you know, the West Los Angeles VA is the largest VA site in the nation, encompassing 387 acres. As such, it carries significant regional, state and national interest for our nation's veterans. The West Los Angeles VA attracts and serves veterans not only from the Los Angeles area, but also from all parts of the state and the country.

According to the California Department of Veterans Affairs, more veterans live within fifty miles of the West Los Angeles VA Center than in 42 other states combined. We hear from veterans regularly that they are in need of quality medical care, support services, mental health programs and affordable housing. We believe it is critical that the West Los Angeles VA serve as a primary location that provides comprehensive services to these veterans.

The property itself has a unique national status. The status is the result of significant protections that were put into place to ensure the land is used to directly benefit our veterans. We were pleased that during deliberations at the CARES public meeting, the Local Advisory Panel acknowledged the protections and adopted them to be used as guiding principles in all decisions regarding the use of the West Los Angeles VA.

The six guiding principles are:


1. To honor the two pieces of federal legislation that have become known collectively as the Cranston Act. This legislation prohibits sale or enhanced-use leases on 109 acres at the West Los Angeles VA. (See Section 421(b)(2) of the Veterans Benefits' and


- Services Act of 1988; Section 401 of the Veterans' Benefits Programs Improvement Act of 1991).
2. To honor the spirit of the 1888 deed from John P. Jones and Arcadia B. de Baker granting the land as an Old Soldiers Home by adopting the principle that in perpetuity the land must be maintained for the direct benefit of veterans.
 3. To preclude commercial use on the property as stated in the letter dated February 25, 2002 from then-Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi to Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky.
 4. To maintain current land use agreements on the property as listed on pages 20 and 21 in the CARES Stage I Summary Report and add the Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Veterans Park Conservancy for a Veterans Park and the City of Los Angeles lease to the list.
 5. To declare that there is no excess land at the West Los Angeles VA.
 6. To abide by the National Preservation Historical Act as it applies to the West Los Angeles VA.


We urge you to use these six principles as a foundation in making ongoing decisions about the West Los Angeles VA. Similarly, we request that you reject any concept or proposal that conflicts with their spirit. Our veterans must have confidence that the federal government will continue to provide them with the services a grateful nation owes them.

We appreciate your attention to our concern in this matter and for your dedicated work on behalf of our nation's veterans.


Sincerely,



HENRY A. WAXMAN
Member of Congress


DIANNE FEINSTEIN
U.S. Senator



BARBARA BOXER
U.S. Senator



HILDA L. SOLÍS
Member of Congress


HOWARD BERMAN
Member of Congress


JANE HARMAN
Member of Congress



LINDA T. SANCHEZ
Member of Congress


ADAM SCHIFF
Member of Congress



GRACE NAPOLITANO
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JUANITA MILLENDER-McDONALD
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