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House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0530

HENRY A. WAXMAN
30TH DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

Statement of Congressman Henry A. Waxman
CARES Local Advisory Panel meeting
September 6, 2007

I thank the CARES Local Advisory Panel for allowing my district director, Lisa Pinto, to read my statement this evening. I also want to extend my appreciation to the panel's members for their careful and thoughtful deliberations throughout this process. Together with local military veterans, community members and elected officials, the Local Advisory Panel has sent a clear message to the VA that this land must be dedicated for the benefit of veterans. No commercial development or sale will be tolerated.

At its last meeting in September, 2005, the Local Advisory Panel unanimously adopted Six Guiding Principles: to follow the intent of the deed, to develop the congressionally mandated master plan, to declare there is no excess land at the West LA VA, to continue leases for veterans' programs, to comply with the National Historic Preservation Act, and to honor the Cranston Act and prohibition on Enhanced Use Leases on Cranston Act acres.

I applaud the Local Advisory Panel for adopting these guidelines. They have clearly had an impact on the VA's proposals, which call for major improvements and new facilities for local veterans who use the West LA VA. These improvements include construction of a new VA hospital, seismic corrections for the buildings in need of retrofitting, construction of a columbarium and co-location of the Regional Veterans Benefits Office, and expansion of mental health services.

Secretary Nicholson also recently announced his decision to make three buildings on the West LA VA campus available for homeless veterans' programs, for which there is a desperate need. I support this project, which is in keeping with the terms of the original grant deed, and I look forward to a full and inclusive process as it is developed.

These are welcome proposals, but no effort will be complete until the West LA VA campus is permanently preserved for the use of veterans. Events in Washington this week alone have demonstrated why it is critical that we ensure the land is protected.

As some of you know, Senator Feinstein and I introduced companion bills earlier this year to protect the entire VA campus from sale or commercial development. Senator Feinstein was successful in getting language from that measure included in the fiscal year 2008 appropriations bill to fund veterans programs.

Two days ago, just before the appropriations bill was considered on the Senate floor, however, the Office of Management and Budget announced the administration's opposition to Senator Feinstein's language because it "would eliminate more than \$4 billion of revenue, which would be used to improve facilities around the country for our Nation's veterans."

When the appropriations bill was considered on the Senate floor yesterday, an amendment was offered to strip Senator Feinstein's language out. She was able to defeat the amendment, but I can assure you that the administration will be persistent in its pursuit of revenue from the VA campus. Senator Feinstein and I will be vigilant in our opposition to this effort and will continue to work hard for passage and enactment of our legislation.

I ask permission to include with my written statement a list of the local officials and veterans organizations endorsing our measure. I believe it is important for the administration to know the depth of veteran and community opposition to its plan, and I request that the Local Advisory Panel vote to disapprove of any commercial development of the campus.

Second, I urge the panel to vote to require the VA to meet its mandate to develop a comprehensive land use master plan for the property that is based on the needs of veterans. The process must be transparent. It will be successful only if key stakeholders are brought to the table. This must begin with the central stakeholders—military veterans—but local elected officials and the VA's neighbors must also have a voice. Without a comprehensive long range plan for the property, which begins with a needs assessment, piecemeal development and private leases will continue.

I want to thank the panel again for your work on this important matter and for taking into consideration the issues I have raised.