

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

July 15, 2011

The Honorable Jacob Lew
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Mr. Lew:

According to recent press reports, Congressional leaders and the White House have been discussing the disposal of government properties as part of debt reduction negotiations. We have worked in partnership for many years to protect the property of the Department of Veterans Affairs West Los Angeles Medical Center (West LA VA) from commercial development. We are writing to express our vehement opposition to the disposal of any part of this property.

After the Civil War, the federal government began to construct national soldiers' homes for disabled and homeless war veterans. Soon after Congress enacted legislation in 1887 to authorize construction of the first soldier's home in the west, Former Senator John P. Jones and his family donated land in Los Angeles for this purpose. The legal deed conveying the property requires that the government maintain it permanently for veterans.

Subsequent legislation passed by Congress in 1988, 1991 and 2007 affirmed that this property was to remain in the possession of the U.S. Veterans Administration (VA) for the benefit of service members. In 1988 and 1991, Senator Alan Cranston successfully passed legislation to prohibit the VA from declaring as excess, or otherwise disposing of, 109 acres of the property. In 2007, Congress included a provision in the Fiscal Year 2008 Consolidated Appropriations Act that extended these protections to the entire 387-acre campus.

Today, after nearly 125 years of serving our nation's veterans, the West LA VA is the largest medical center in the VA system. Further, it is the nerve center of the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System, which serves 1.4 million veterans in Southern California and 530,000 veterans in the greater Los Angeles area. The West LA VA provides a full range of veteran services, including state-

of-the art hospital and outpatient care, mental health care, rehabilitation, residential care, and long term care. It is also a center for medical research and education for the Veterans Health Administration.

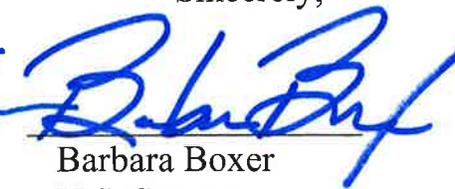
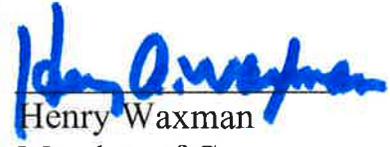
The VA has already established that there is very limited potential for reuse of this property. The “West Los Angeles VA Medical Center Master Plan,” which the VA finalized on June 23, 2011 and lays out long term priorities and guidelines for the campus, asserts, “The areas of the campus open for development or reuse are limited to a very small portion of the property that is not consumed by the CARES capital plan, VA’s SCIP process, or existing long term land use agreements.”

The West Los Angeles VA property can and should be used to help rehabilitate our nation’s veterans and provide housing and therapeutic services for the over 8,000 homeless veterans in the LA area. However, if this property were to ever leave federal jurisdiction, the use of the space would be constrained by local zoning codes requiring it to be used for open space and institutional uses. This brings into question how much revenue this property could actually generate.

Auctioning the West LA VA property to the highest bidder would bring in some short-term revenue for our immediate needs, in the same way that building high-rises on the National Mall would raise money. But, it would be a tremendous disservice to our veterans and it would contradict the terms of the 1888 deed. We have a permanent obligation to keep our promises to our veterans and we have a moral and legal duty to honor the contract that gave us use of the land in the first place.

Nothing unites the Los Angeles community more than the battle to preserve the West LA VA for its original purpose. We will fight hard to protect this critically important facility for our nation’s veterans.

Sincerely,

		
Dianne Feinstein U.S. Senator	Barbara Boxer U.S. Senator	Henry Waxman Member of Congress