

Dear Editor:

In his July 6, 2007 remarks to *LA Times* reporter, Martha Groves, Secretary of Veterans' Affairs Jim Nicholson did not rule out commercial development for the West L.A. Veterans Campus land. It is unconscionable that the Secretary contemplates commercial development of land that was donated in 1888 with the condition that it be permanently maintained as a home for veterans. Given this charitable trust, the Secretary must rule out commercial use.

The draft "masterplan" that he refers to is nothing more than a business plan to exploit this sacred land. A true masterplan must address the needs of veterans, not the desires of developers. Only direct services to Veterans may be permitted on this historic Civil War Veterans Home.

For decades, the VA has been a slumlord and destroyed many historic buildings and trees. Veterans deserve to have their land and buildings respected and preserved, not looted.

The Secretary's belief that every inch of this campus must be developed threatens open space. Open space is not wasted space. It is a refuge for shell-shocked combat veterans to recover. Just like the Civil War Veterans who lived on these grounds, many of the Iraq-Afghanistan returnees will need quiet and solitude to heal that a hospital alone cannot provide.

Legislation proposed by Senator Dianne Feinstein and Congressman Henry Waxman would protect this land forever and produce a masterplan that meets the needs of Veterans in a manner compatible with the adjacent communities. Then Congress must fund these programs so that Veterans finally receive what a grateful nation owes them.

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