

As you are aware, a veterans cemetery at Fort Ord is one of my top priorities. Most recently, I authored language that required the VA to issue a report on the options for a local cemetery. This report reiterated the VA's policy on establishing national cemeteries and confirmed undeniably that Fort Ord does not qualify for a national cemetery.

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[Invite to VA to Visit Fort Ord](#)

[Letter to CA VA Secretary](#)

[Letter to Californian on VA Report](#)

[VA Report on Fort Ord](#)

[Letter to Sen. Denham on Cemetery](#)

[Letter in Support of Petition](#)

But the report enthusiastically offered an alternative solution: a state cemetery. This confirms what VA officials and I have been saying for years: Fort Ord is ideally suited for a state veterans cemetery.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has two options when building a veterans cemetery - through the National Cemetery Program or the State Cemetery Grant Program. The National Cemetery Program has two very strict eligibility requirements: an area must be inhabited by at least 170,000 veterans within a 70 mile radius, and be farther than 75 miles from another National Cemetery . Unfortunately the VA has repeatedly concluded that Fort Ord meets neither of these criteria. According to the VA, approximately 50,000 veterans live in the tri-County area and we are within 75 miles, as measured in a straight line, to the San Joaquin Valley National Cemetery .

The State Veterans Cemetery Grant program can be used to establish the same exact kind of cemetery at Fort Ord. A State Cemetery is physically identical to a National Cemetery ; every blade of grass has to meet the exact same standards. The only difference is that the State pays for the cemetery's maintenance and operation. If the State commits to covering O&M costs, then federal funding will cover 100% of construction costs. I have ensured that Fort Ord would be at the top of the list for this federal funding should the State apply for a Grant.

Unfortunately, both the Davis and Schwarzenegger Administrations have failed to apply to the program because of budget concerns. However, if we can find a guaranteed local funding source to supplement or supplant State funds, the State cemetery application can move forward. I am currently in the process of gathering ideas from local officials and state representatives on how this creative funding mix could be accomplished.

The quickest path to a veterans cemetery at Fort Ord is clear: a state - federal partnership for a State Cemetery . Federal legislators and federal agencies are on board with this plan and ready to act once the state fulfills its part of the partnership. Now we must focus on making our cemetery a priority for the legislators and leaders of the state of California . Veterans and

their families deserve a final resting place at Fort Ord.