

Last month, the FY07 Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill was passed out of the House of Representatives. This bill contains language I authored that, for the first time, provides a new opportunity for creating state-sponsored veterans cemeteries: public-private partnerships. Fort Ord has been selected as the ideal place for the pilot project of this innovative idea.

The exact language from the bill is as follows:

*"The Committee notes the success of the military housing RCI as a public/private partnership. The Committee encourages the Department of Veterans Affairs to work with the Fort Ord Reuse Authority in Monterey, California to develop a pilot program to demonstrate the cost effectiveness of using public/private partnerships in establishing a state veterans cemetery at Fort Ord"* (H. Rept. 109-464)

A Department of Veterans Affairs report released earlier this year concluded that the quickest path to establishing a veterans cemetery at Fort Ord is via the State Cemetery Grants Program, as opposed to the National Cemetery Program. Under the State Cemetery Grants Program, the federal government covers 100 percent of construction costs, but the state must commit to covering annual operations and maintenance costs.

Due to budgetary concerns, California has been reluctant to make this yearly funding commitment. But this public-private partnership language will provide a road map to the creation of a Fort Ord State Veterans Cemetery by relieving the State of California of the annual operations and maintenance costs, while providing a new revenue stream that will allow the state to apply to the federal government to start construction.

This partnership is the key to making a state cemetery a reality. At a recent meeting with FORA officials and state legislators, we agreed to work together to implement this public-private partnership. Veterans on the Central Coast have been waiting a long time for a veterans cemetery, and with this initiative their dream for the Fort Ord State Veterans Cemetery will be fulfilled.

As the details on this innovative new program emerge, I will be certain to keep you abreast of any new developments.

[Further information about the Veterans Cemetery](#) .