

Senate Passes Feinstein Bill to Ensure California VA Construction Projects Proceed

Washington—The U.S. Senate last night unanimously approved legislation introduced by Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) to allow the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to advance critical seismic safety and construction projects at facilities in San Francisco, Long Beach, Alameda Point, Fremont, French Camp and Los Angeles. Senators Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) and Ben Cardin (D-Md.) are cosponsors of the legislation.

The final spending bill passed in December 2015 included \$563 million for California projects: \$161 million for Long Beach, \$158 million for Fort Miley, \$70 million for Alameda Point, \$139 million for Fremont and French Camp and \$35 million for West Los Angeles. The bill also included \$75 million for Louisville, Ky., \$11 million for American Lake, Wash. and \$83.7 million for Perry Point, Md.

However, VA is not able to spend the money appropriated by Congress due to a technical requirement that the projects also be approved by the Veterans' Affairs Committees. Congress did not pass legislation last year to authorize VA's requested construction projects. Feinstein's bill provides the required authorization.

“The next big California earthquake is a question of when, not if. The seismic safety improvements planned at our largest VA facilities are essential to ensure the safety of veterans and their families, health care providers and staff,” said Senator Feinstein. **“These projects are also critical to meeting health care and housing needs for veterans throughout California. I’m pleased the Senate quickly approved these projects and urge the House to do the same.”**

The U.S. Geological Survey estimates that California suffers a magnitude 6.7 or greater earthquake every 6.3 years, on average. It also reports that California's risk of being struck by a magnitude 8.0 or greater earthquake has increased by nearly 50 percent since the agency completed its last estimate in 2008.