



Sharon Quirk-Silva ✓

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Dear Friends,

Since I was elected to the California State Assembly in 2012, I began working with Veteran groups to bring a Veteran Cemetery to Orange County. With the help of Irvine City Council, and the state, we were able to designate a site that veterans and council members supported, the ARDA Site, 2013.

At that time, Governor Jerry Brown, came out to see the ARDA Site and lend his support. I want to sincerely thank the original council members: Council Members: Larry Agran, Steven Choi, Beth Krom, Larry Lalloway, and Christina Shea for their continued support. Little did we know that six years later we would still be working to find a site, and resume efforts to gain support for this important project.

In 2014, I lost my election and returned to teaching. Assembly Member Tom Daly, worked for two years to keep the veterans cemetery moving forward. He has been a champion for OC Veterans.

No one appreciates his long term support more than I do! So, upon returning to elected office in 2016, I returned to getting a cemetery built. Council Members in Irvine had changed, and a new site was proposed; the Strawberry Site. I had always stated that I would support Irvine leaders and residents in their site choice. Coming from local government as a former council member, I do not want to tell local officials where the site should be.

A new council majority voted for a new site, and I amended my bill to the new Strawberry Site. Governor Brown returned to see the new site. I secured funding in the budget for a cemetery and things were moving ahead.

I wish I could say things moved swiftly, but that was not the case. Former Mayor Larry Agran ran an initiative against the Strawberry Site and voters agreed. That was June 2018.

Now, in 2019, I was surprised that the Strawberry Site was not favored by voters but I was not deterred. I was elected for another term in 2018, as well as Assembly Member Tom Daly, and Senator Tom Umberg (A highly decorated Veteran). All three of us made it a priority to work toward getting a cemetery built at the original ARDA site. We were supported in the 2019 July budget by receiving \$20 Million for a Cemetery.

I sincerely thank my Democrat and Republican colleagues for their valued support, by voting for the legislation. I also want to recognize Assembly Members Daly and Senator Umberg for putting veterans first. Their budget requests secured much of the funding. I also apologize to those who have gone step by step with us, and are frustrated by the twists and turns, and delays.

At the same time we were working on our State Cemetery Bill, the Irvine City Council Members have also changed in 2018. With almost a complete new council and Mayor, the cemetery was revisited. Mayor Shea, asked her team to start to analyze a new site, known as the Golf Site. Our bill was moving through the legislative cycle as the Golf Site was moving through the planning commission. I was initially not on board with looking at a new site (Golf Site) and did not agree to amend the bill in a Senate Hearing. However, I promised to work on the bill over the summer recess as I presented the bill to the Veteran's Committee. With this promise, I received the votes to get the bill out of committee.

That takes us to the last 3 weeks.

Since the committee hearing, several things have occurred to allow me to attain more information regarding the ARDA site:

1. The Irvine Council voted 4-1 to support the Golf Site.
2. I visited the Golf Site and believe it will cost much less to build this cemetery, than at the ARDA site.
3. Many, many established veterans groups support the Golf Site.
4. The council just voted to rezone the ARDA Site for small retail and some recreation. There will be no houses built and no hotels built at the ARDA site now.
5. Neighboring schools, and many homeowners have voiced that they are against the ARDA site.

6. There is an active street, Cadence, that would go right through the cemetery.
7. The gun salutes for veterans at funerals, could cause stress to school children.
8. There are many buildings and some historical/culture buildings that would need to be removed on the ARDA site.
9. The price of the ARDA is not fully funded.
10. Getting the ARDA site built and open would take much longer, than the Golf Site.

With all of this information, I have decided to amend my bill. The new language will state, that the site for the veteran's cemetery would be the Golf Site. In addition, it will state that Cal Vet, will move forward with a site analysis, as soon as possible.

There are still many uncertain scenarios that can happen:

1. Former Mayor, Larry Agran has filed an initiative to ask voters to support the ARDA Site as the only site for an Irvine Cemetery. There will be a signature gathering effort. If this initiative is successful, the Golf Site would not be built.
2. The bill still has to make it out of appropriations with amendments. The Chair of the committee has not indicated support for either site.
3. The Senate and Assembly would have to vote on the floor to support the bill as amended.
4. The Governor would have to sign the bill by the end of September.

In the mean time, we have have our veterans, who have served us. Them, and their families, are waiting for a peaceful place to be laid to rest. We know that everyday we are losing our World War II Veterans. In the last six years, I have had many Veterans stop me and say, "Thank you for your work on the cemetery, but hurry up. I may not make it!"

I sincerely want to reference and thank all who have put energy and efforts to get this done. Former Mayor, Larry Agran gave his vote and time to start this effort. I appreciate this and so many others who have worked tirelessly on this effort.

We have no excuses to not get this down now. We have the land, the funds, and the will. I beg all of you that are invested in this Orange County Veteran Cemetery to put aside your differences and get moving on this project. It is the least we can do to show respect for those that have stepped up to serve our country!

God Bless America!

Assembly Member Sharon Quirk-Silva



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