

Tuesday, May 27, 2008

Barbara Boxer wants federal funding for Great Park

Senator says money would go toward environmental and military recognition projects.

By SEAN EMERY
STAFF WRITER

IRVINE – Sen. Barbara Boxer on Tuesday got a first-hand look at the future home of the Great Park, announcing her intention to seek federal assistance in making several parts of the ambitious project a reality.

Boxer (D-CA), who serves as chair of the Senate's Environment and Public Works Committee, said the funds would go toward the creation of a 30-to-50-acre community farm, the refurbishment of a historic WWII hangar for public use and a storm water reclamation and management system.

"I'm going to fight to get these appropriations for you, right now, this year," Boxer said. "I want to be a part of this adventure."

Lead designer Ken Smith gave Boxer a brief update on the parks master plan, which is approaching the 70 percent completion mark. The ambitious plans call for the transformation of the former El Toro Marine Base into the \$1.1 billion, 1,374-acre Great Park.

Boxer praised park designers' plans to restore natural and agricultural land to the area, as well as efforts to retain and celebrate the site's military heritage. She was unaware of how much federal money is available for the park, but indicated that it would be tied to matching local funds.

"I don't look at this as subsidizing anything," Boxer said. "I look at it as an investment."

Boxer's ties to the Great Park effort date back nearly a decade, said Larry Agran, chairman of the parks board of directors, who first approached her to weigh in on the battle between those who wanted to turn El Toro into a commercial airport and Great Park proponents. Boxer said it was important that the issue was decided on a local level.

"This has not been easy. This has been hard fought. But the fight is over," Boxer said. "We need to stick together and get this done."

Boxer's visit comes a little more than a month before local leaders are scheduled to celebrate the third anniversary of the Great Park's approval. The celebration on July 12, known as the "Festival of Flight," is also scheduled to include the return of the Great Park balloon ride, and the unveiling of the first section of a 27.5 acre preview park.

Agran acknowledged the sometimes difficult road in creating the Great Park – from the initial airport battles to the current housing crunch that has delayed adjacent development – but expressed optimism for the park's future.

"We faced challenges in the past. We continue to face challenges," Agran said. "But fundamentally this is a great opportunity."

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PARK PLACE: U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer speaks in front of a poster of the proposed Great Park in Irvine as she shows her support during a visit.