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# California State Senate

SENATOR

JACK O'CONNELL  
EIGHTEENTH SENATORIAL DISTRICT



CHAIR:  
BUDGET & FISCAL REVIEW  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
COASTAL CAUCUS  
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BUDGET AND FISCAL REVIEW  
BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONS  
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EDUCATION  
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JUDICIARY  
NATURAL RESOURCES

August 22, 1997

R. J. Considine, Jr., Chair  
Ad Hoc Committee on Campus  
Development Ventures  
Board of Trustees  
California State University  
400 Golden Shore  
Long Beach, California 90802-4275  
Via fax: 562-985-2808

Dear Mr. Considine:

I regret that the convening of the State Senate precludes my personal appearance before your committee on Monday, August 25 when you consider accepting the challenges associated with converting the now-closed Camarillo State Hospital (CSH) to the 23rd campus of the California State University system. Please seriously consider these comments as you deliberate this golden opportunity to create CSU, Channel Islands (CSUCI).

I am totally committed to bringing a four-year, public university to the County of Ventura. For more than 30 years, state leaders dating back to Governor Pat Brown have recognized the need and desire for a four-year university in this county. As you are no doubt aware, this is the largest county in the state without a public university. Further, the number of high school graduates from Ventura County attending college is far below the state average, and studies have shown a low college participation rate is directly related to the lack of access to a four-year university. Additionally, other studies have concluded that individuals with a college education tend to locate in areas with a university. The South Coast must have an educated workforce from which business can draw if our local economy is to grow and prosper.

I have appreciated the commitment of CSU to meet the educational needs of Venturans through the establishment of the Northridge satellite in Ventura. The extension has provided thousands of students with some access to a bachelor's degree, but its limited capacity both in enrollment and curricula cannot begin to meet the needs of Venturans or the state.

Looking beyond the specific needs of residents of this county, as you are so keenly aware, Governor Wilson's Department of Finance and the California Postsecondary Education Commission have both projected that we will need to double the capacity of our universities and colleges to meet what I term the "baby boom echo" expected by the year 2005. Although we can meet some of this capacity by using our existing campuses more efficiently (e.g. longer hours and year-round), expanding existing campuses, and increasing financial aid awards for those students seeking their education at private universities, these efforts alone will not meet the needs of our students and their families or our business sector which is screaming for more trained workers.

Although the impacts associated with the closure of Camarillo State Hospital have been very difficult on the employees and clients of the facility, as well as their families, the fact remains that the site is closed and idle and I strongly believe its site presents you with a tremendous opportunity to afford the current generation of Venturans and Central Coast residents with a four-year university quickly and efficiently. Its campus-like atmosphere, beautiful trees and buildings, and recreational amenities are perfect for a public university. Interestingly, my mother, Ruth O'Connell Kent, who still lives in the area, was a nurse at CSH in the 1960's when the hospital was a residence for thousands of clients. What has stayed with me over the years is a comment she made upon her return from work one day about how well suited the hospital was for a public university. It was particularly important to her at the time to see a university come to the area since I was to later leave home for CSU, Fullerton where I earned my bachelor's degree.

Indeed, the facility is larger than the typical CSU campus and whether the space can be fully utilized has yet to be determined. However, I have every confidence that the CSU has pulled in one of its most capable leaders, Handel Evans, to make this work. His success in leading the conversion of Fort Ord to the 21st campus in the CSU system is clear evidence of that fact. These hospital facilities are far better suited to a university than any military base.

If you have not heard officially from leaders in Ventura County, please know that support for this effort is universal and the critics are few. I have resolutions from the cities of San Buenaventura, Oxnard, Camarillo, and Port Hueneme, the County of Ventura, the Ventura County Economic Development Association, the Oxnard Chamber of Commerce, and the Ventura County Taxpayers Association all in support of this campus, and as well as individuals too many to name specifically.

I have followed very closely the comments of CSU representatives and trustees concerning the conversion of CSH and noted the obvious and relevant concern about financing this effort. What has been conspicuously absent from the reported comments has been the tremendous cost-savings to the state associated with the conversion of CSH versus the development of the property on Lewis Road. You know better than I the costs of building a campus when you start with only dirt as a resource. But I will hazard a guess and suggest that to build a campus from

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scratch would cost us \$750 million to \$1 billion over a twenty-year period. Obviously the costs of converting a gem like CSH must be one-half to one-third of those associated with transforming a lemon orchard into a university, and the time difference literally equals a generation of students.

I am sensitive to your concerns about the financial impacts on other university programs possibly resulting from opening the doors at CSUCL. However, you have my commitment as Chairman of the Senate Budget Committee's Subcommittee on Education to do everything I can to secure the resources necessary to make the conversion process smooth and efficient, and to prevent any adverse impacts on other CSU programs.

Thank you for your consideration of my views. I remain available to assist you with the successful conversion of Camarillo State Hospital in any way I can.

Sincerely,



JACK O'CONNELL

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c: Dr. Barry Munitz, Chancellor  
California State University  
Dr. J. Handel Evans, President  
California State University, Channel Islands