

January 5, 2015

American Icon Rafer Johnson and Neighborhood Councils Challenge City Hall to End Veteran Homelessness in LA



Rafer Johnson, America's legendary Olympic Decathlon Champion and Civil Rights icon who marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Bobby Kennedy and Cesar Chavez, helped usher in 2015 when he spoke before the Los Angeles Neighborhood Council Coalition (LANCC), that represents 96 communities, and proclaimed that Los Angeles is in a "State of Emergency" for disabled and homeless Veterans.

At the January 3rd meeting, Rafer sent forth a powerful message that began the new year with a jolt by challenging the City of Los Angeles to unify with the Veterans Administration (VA) and immediately begin providing crisis housing for disabled and homeless veterans at the West Los Angeles VA that has nearly 400 acres of land.

Rafer's challenge is clearly the most logical and forthright solution to Mayor Eric Garcetti and First Lady Michelle Obama's mandate to end veteran homelessness in Los Angeles by the end of this year.

Rafer questioned how the largest VA property in the nation could simultaneously be situated in our nation's capital for homeless Veterans.

Stop the inhumane treatment of disabled homeless Veterans in Los Angeles

Jay Handal, Chairman of the West Los Angeles Community Council, presented a Motion that reiterated Rafer's staunch request and it was unanimously approved with zero nays and only one abstained vote.

Summary of the Motion: *"The Los Angeles Alliance of Neighborhood Councils recognizes Los Angeles to be in a "state of emergency" for homeless Veterans and hereby requests the Los Angeles City Council direct the City of Los Angeles with all of its resources and the Veterans Administration to unify and open a large-scale Crisis Humanitarian Relief Project on this land to immediately house and care for thousands upon thousands of disabled and homeless Veterans."*

Terrence Gomes, Chairman of LANCC, will now send a letter with the Motion to Mayor Garcetti, the Los Angeles City Council, newly elected U.S. Congressman Ted Lieu, Senator Dianne Feinstein, the Secretary of the VA and Los Angeles VA officials, and other notable politicians.

Ted Lieu, a Veteran, replaces non-Veteran Henry Waxman who spent 40 years in Congress and tragically answered to the "wants" of his wealthy constituents instead of providing for the "needs" of disabled and homeless Veterans.

Congressman-elect Lieu will now be the entrusted public servant to oversee the largest VA in the nation. Correspondingly, his fellow Veterans are demanding major changes from the way Henry Waxman "oversaw" the VA's mismanagement and misappropriation of land and consequent neglect of disabled and homeless Veterans.

Rafer's message and LAANC's subsequent Motion now challenges the sincerity and credibility of all public servants who have promised to end Veteran homelessness in Los Angeles as this clearly defines the urgency and necessity to establish a Humanitarian Relief project on the West LA VA grounds.

Rafer Johnson's humanitarian credentials are impeccable and his lifetime leadership for the greater good of the less fortunate are essentially unequalled.

Thus, Rafer's selfless and solidarity support for this noble cause on behalf of disabled and homeless Veterans is consistent with his moral judgment of doing what's right, so it was no surprise when he stepped forward and proclaimed Los Angeles to be in a "State of Emergency" for disabled homeless Veterans, and called for immediate crisis housing and care at the Los Angeles VA.

Rafer's legacy of defending the defenseless and protecting the Civil and Human Rights of those who have no voice, speaks volumes on behalf of our voiceless war-injured and impoverished homeless Veterans who have been forced to live homeless and hungry on skid row and back-alley squalor, instead of being housed and cared for on the very land that was deeded in their behalf in 1888.

Consistent with his lifetime legacy of standing up for the less fortunate, Rafer was instrumental in helping establish and organize the "Special Olympics" that was

famously conceived by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, sister of U.S. President John F. Kennedy and U.S Senator Robert F. Kennedy. Rafer is still very active as leader and Chairman of the Southern California Special Olympics and rode on the organization's float during the recent Rose Bowl Parade. The "World Games" of the Special Olympics will be held in Los Angeles this summer, and Rafer is also on the committee to bring the 2024 Olympic Games to Los Angeles.

During the Vietnam War era, Rafer served in the National Guard and has been a lifetime champion supporting and defending disabled and homeless Veterans. He is particularly concerned that nearly half (47%) of all homeless Veterans today are of the Vietnam War era, a war that ended nearly 40 years ago, and recommended that the Los Angeles VA set up a "tent city" similar to the one that housed and cared for 50,000 Vietnamese Refugees after the end of the Vietnam War.

Rafer wrote a best-selling book, "The Best That I Can Be," which is what his whole life has been about doing his very best to use his God-given talents to help those who need help in developing their own abilities to become the best that they can be.

This book is a must-read for every child as well as every adult, particularly those who have been entrusted as public servants in all branches of local, state and federal government.

During the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. King proclaimed: *"I'm not a consensus leader. I don't determine what is right and wrong by looking at the budget of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference or by taking a Gallup poll of the majority opinion.*

Ultimately a genuine leader is not a searcher of consensus but a molder of consensus.

On some positions cowardice asks the question, is it safe?

Expediency asks the question, is it politic?

Vanity asks the question, is it popular?

But conscience asks the question, is it right?

And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular but he must take it because conscience tells him it is right."

And so it is with Rafer Johnson's leadership in speaking before the Neighborhood Councils, because his conscience tells him that it is right to stand up for our disabled and homeless Veterans and to be a voice for their safety and well-being.

Dr. King also forewarned: *"The hottest place in Hell is reserved for those who remain neutral in times of great moral conflict."*

Make no mistake; the homeless Veteran issue in Los Angeles is a moral conflict between justice and injustice, good and bad, right and wrong.

Fellow Veterans, friends of Veterans and elected public officials are respectfully requested to do the right thing and join Rafer Johnson and LANCC in challenging that Los Angeles is in a "State of Emergency" for disabled and homeless Veterans, and further charge the City of Los Angeles and the VA with immediately unifying and providing crisis housing and care for thousands of homeless veterans on the West Los Angeles VA property.

**THE LOS ANGELES NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL COALITION
GENERAL MEETING - JANUARY 3, 2015 – 10:00 AM**

Hollywood Constituent Center
6501 Fountain Avenue - Hollywood, CA

**RAFER JOHNSON -- Summary excerpt from his compelling speech before
LANCC on January 3, 2015:**

"I believe everyone involved in ending the homelessness of our veterans should have been and certainly by now should be acting in a state of emergency. Los Angeles has the largest population of homeless veterans in the nation. There have been pledges made to end veterans' homelessness by the end of 2015. That isn't good enough. When there is an emergency it is imperative to respond immediately. Why aren't we using the nearly 400 acres of land at the West LA Veterans property to immediately provide temporary and or permanent housing for our homeless veterans? There is a state of emergency here in Los Angeles and the time to act is now!"

MOTION PRESENTED:

Los Angeles has the largest Homeless Veteran population in the Nation. Paradoxically, Los Angeles also has the largest VA Veterans Home property in the Nation.

Mayor Garcetti has pledged to end Veteran homelessness in Los Angeles by the end of 2015 without ever mentioning the utilization of nearly 400 acres of land at the West LA VA property as a solution.

The challenge to end Veteran homelessness in less than 12 months must require immediate provisional, temporary and permanent supportive housing and healthcare and that will only happen at the Los Angeles VA property where there's plenty of space and an existing VA Hospital.

The Los Angeles Neighborhood Council Coalition (LANCC) recognizes Los Angeles to be in a "state of emergency" for homeless Veterans and hereby requests that the Los Angeles City Council direct the City of Los Angeles with all of its resources and the Veterans Administration to unify and open a large-scale Crisis Humanitarian Relief Project on this land to immediately house and care for thousands upon thousands of disabled homeless Veterans

MOTION UNANIMOUSLY PASSED

<https://www.citywatchla.com/index.php/archive/8152-american-icon-rafer-johnson-and-neighborhood-councils-challenge-city-hall-to-end-veteran-homelessness-in-la>