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House of Representatives

SUPPORT THE VA EMERGENCY MEDICAL CENTERS!!!

HON. BOB FILNER
OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. FILNER: Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time. I thank the chairman of the full committee, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. *Smith*), for his enthusiastic and incredible farsightedness in sponsoring this legislation which will set up, as we have heard, four new emergency medical preparedness centers within the Department of Veterans Affairs. These centers obviously expand what is already a leadership role in the areas of emergency preparedness, research, education and prevention of bioterrorism and is consistent with the challenges that VA is already meeting at both the local and national level.

In the immediate aftermath of the events of September 11, the VA, of course, was front and center, contributing its expertise wherever possible, especially in the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder in New York City and right here in our own backyard. VA research has long been recognized as ground breaking, with benefits that extend beyond our reach and improve

the lives of veterans and countless others. As we have heard from our chairman, at the VA medical center in my hometown of San Diego, they have found a promising treatment for smallpox. This kind of effort will save potentially thousands of lives and highlights the kind of contributions that the VA is already making to our public health and safety.

We should take VA's existing infrastructure and strengths to even greater heights. That is what H.R. 3253 does. At earlier meetings of our subcommittee and committee, concerns were expressed whether the funding for these new centers would impinge on the funding of our already-strapped funds for our veterans and their medical and benefit needs now. I was glad to hear that the chairman has said that the cost of these centers will come from antiterrorist funds already appropriated.

With that concern met, I think we should all vote for H.R. 3253. It will help us prepare for the future. Let us support this measure.

