



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 107th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2001

House of Representatives

TIME TO END HOMELESSNESS FOR VETERANS!

HON. BOB FILNER
OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MR. FILNER: Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 2716, the Homeless Veterans Comprehensive Assistance Act of 2001. This homeless bill retains the best components of two individuals bills, introduced by Ranking Member Evans and Chairman Smith. I was an original co-sponsor of H.R. 936, the Heather French Henry Homeless Veterans Assistance Act introduced by Ranking Member Evans and later in the Senate as S. 736 by Senator Paul Wellstone, because I believed it would enhance effective programs serving homeless veterans, such as community based "grant and per diem" care, the homeless veterans reintegration program, and the comprehensive homeless veterans centers. In particular, the bill emphasizes the VA's mental health and substance abuse programs--programs that help veterans achieve the stability they need in order to move toward rebuilding productive lives.

I also believe H.R. 936 would address gaps in VA's care continuum that have been identified by homeless veterans their advocates, such as dental care and outreach to prevent veterans at risk for homelessness. It allows innovative new grant programs to address the needs of veterans whose needs may not be addressed by mainstream programs--programs for terminally ill veterans, veterans with "dual diagnosis", that is mental illness and substance abuse disorders, frail elderly veterans, and women.

In Committee hearings, Members from both sides of the aisle identified both the medical necessity and the social importance of a dental benefit in helping veterans regain their footing in society. I believe dental care is an important, but underemphasized part of the VA health care system. This is a small, but critical step we can take toward making this service available to additional veterans.

I also appreciate elements of Chairman Smith's bill, the Homeless Veterans' Assistance Act. I particularly appreciated his bill's emphasis on finding permanent supported housing options for homeless veterans.

Together, the composite legislation will allow VA to consolidate and coordinate programs for homeless veterans both within the Department, within other federal agencies, and in the non-profit sector that furnish services to our homeless veterans. I believe this comprehensive homeless legislation will make a real difference in the lives of America's homeless veterans.

The final bill retains the stated goal of H.R. 936: to end chronic homelessness among veterans within a decade. I believe the comprehensive bill before us puts the Department of Veterans Affairs on the right path for making this happen. I urge my colleagues to support this measure.