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House of Representatives

OUR NATION IS NOT HEALTHY UNLESS EVERYONE IS HEALTHY!

HON. BOB FILNER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MR. FILNER: Mr. Speaker, our Nation is not healthy unless everyone is. I rise in strong opposition to the Undocumented Alien Emergency Medical Assistance Amendments.

It is true that hospitals in San Diego, Imperial County and throughout the border region need Federal assistance to pay for the uncompensated care they provide. Instead of debating H.R. 3722, however, I would prefer to debate and vote on my Pay Up! Act, H.R. 2848, aimed at offering full Federal reimbursement to hospitals for the service they provide to undocumented patients. My bill would not force nurses and doctors and other medical professionals to suddenly become de facto immigration officials.

Unfortunately, the dangerous legislation that we are considering today would do exactly that: it would deny Federal reimbursement to emergency health service providers unless they agree to also serve as immigration agents.

As California's Border Congressman, I can tell you this legislation would be a disaster for border communities. It would put an extra burden on our already overworked health care professionals, as they scramble to find the resources to collect and process patients'

immigration information, biometric identifiers and financial data. This legislation will lead to fear and confusion among both documented and undocumented immigrant families, discouraging them from getting necessary medical attention for children, pregnant women, the elderly and others. In fact, this legislation could put everyone's health at risk. The University of California at San Diego Medical Center has warned that this bill "could undermine public health by deterring those with contagious diseases from seeking care."

This bill puts the lives of immigrants at risk. It puts our health care services at risk. It puts our public health at risk.

On behalf of California's border communities, I urge my colleagues to not force doctors to spend their time figuring out which patients are in good standing with our complex immigration laws. I urge my colleagues to not force immigrant families to skip treatment for life-threatening medical problems because they fear deportation. I urge my colleagues to vote "no" on the Undocumented Alien Emergency Medical Assistance Amendments.