



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 108th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

MONDAY, July 21, 2003

House of Representatives

ASSURED FUNDING FOR VETERANS HEALTH CARE ACT OF 2003

**HON. BOB FILNER
OF CALIFORNIA**

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MR. FILNER: Madam Speaker and colleagues, I rise today in support of guaranteed funding for veterans' health care as found in H.R. 2318.

This bill replaces the current "discretionary" funding process with a reliable, predictable, and rational way to assure that the funding that is needed for our veterans will be there! Guaranteed funding takes into account inflation and increased enrollment for VA health care and provides the money to meet these needs.

Currently, the Members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee and many of our other colleagues must join together with organizations like the Disabled American Veterans, the Paralyzed Veterans of America, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, AMVETS, the American Legion and others to fight for a budget to provide health care for veterans--a budget that is worthy of our veterans. And we must do this every year!

And unfortunately, every year we fall far short of our goal. Veterans' health care needs are pitted against many other priorities of Congress and the administration, and we end up with less money than we need. The result, as many of you know, is disastrous. Right now, an entire group of veterans is being denied access to the VA health care system. And over 200,000 other veterans are waiting for a first appointment or an initial follow-up for health care, many waiting for more than 6 months.

This year, the House passed a budget resolution that cut \$25 billion from veterans' benefits. Twenty-five billion dollars! Although the final budget resolution is better, it is unclear how veteran's health care will fare when pitted against all the other programs in the VA-HUD-Independent Agencies Appropriations bill--programs like low-income housing, the space program, environmental protections, urban

(over)

development, and inner-city projects. These are worthy, but we should not have to limit services to veterans in order to fund them. That is why this legislation is so vital.

Other federal health care programs like Medicare, the Defense Department's Tricare for Life, and the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program are being provided with guaranteed funding. Why not our Nation's veterans?

Not only is the current "discretionary" funding unfair to veterans of past wars, but the lack of guaranteed funding sends an alarming message to current and future members of the Armed Forces.

Recruitment and retention of service members is vital to the security of our country.

This bill responds to the recommendations of the President's Task Force to Improve Health Care Delivery for Our Nation's Veterans. This task force recently testified before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee to the "growing mismatch between funding and demand in VA health care".

H.R. 2318 will address this mismatch, and will help the VA to keep pace with increasing medical costs and an increasing patient population.