



# Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 108<sup>th</sup> CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

THURSDAY, October 16, 2003

## *House of Representatives*

# FAIRNESS FOR OUR NATION'S DISABLED MILITARY RETIREES!

**HON. BOB FILNER**

**OF CALIFORNIA**

**IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

*Congressman Bob Filner rose to introduce an amendment to the \$87 billion appropriation bill for Iraq that would limit the disabled veterans tax and restore concurrent receipt of military retired pay and VA disability compensation to thousands of military retirees who have service-connected disabilities. He then asked: What about the troops returning home?*

**MR. FILNER:** Looking at this chart, we have requested \$87 billion this evening for Iraq for a total of \$201 billion. What we spend on veterans benefits this year is less than \$62 billion; on food and nutrition 46; on education 34; on the environment 30; on housing 30. But what about the troops that are coming home after they have been in Iraq? Are we going to provide for them? We have not provided sufficient money for their health care as veterans. We have not provided money for what we call concurrent receipt. My amendment

says that there shall be full funding for those military retirees, for their pension and for their disability if they are so disabled. It provides the money for full funding of concurrent receipt.

Why must we do this? Why must we work for our veterans? Why must we make sure that when our young men and women come home, they are provided for? In our budget resolution of this House, we make sure that over 150,000 veterans are still waiting 6 months for their first appointment. Thousands, tens of thousands of veterans are waiting for their disability claims to be adjudicated. We have not provided enough money for their care. And we have levied a tax on our military retirees for their disability. Yes, we have a disability, a veterans disability tax on those retirees. On the one hand, they earned their pension through their service to our Nation. And we have talked a lot about support of our troops tonight, but we are not supporting them when they

(over)

come home because they have to choose between getting their pension and, if they are disabled, getting their disability. They are actually having to pay for their own disability. We are making them pay for their food in the hospitals right now, except for an amendment by the chair of the Committee on Appropriations, so we are taxing them on their disability.

Mr. Chairman, these are not the priorities for this Nation. This is not the way a grateful Nation treats its young men and women who are so brave in their service whether to our Nation in Korea or Vietnam or in the Persian Gulf.

Mr. Chairman, there is rumor today that the Republicans will say they have taken care of concurrent receipt. They have made a deal to cover this. What the Republicans have done, and which I urge all veterans groups to oppose, is to say those veterans with over 50 percent disability, only those will get some money, and we will phase that in over 10 years. So in the first year, they will get one-tenth of one-half of what they deserve. That is not a way to treat the folks who we are supposed to be supporting with our supplemental today.

Let me tell you under the Republican proposal for concurrent receipt what occurs. A Vietnam retiree who is disabled

by an amputation below the knee is not covered by the Republican plan for concurrent receipt. He gets no disability. He continues to pay his veterans disability tax. The Korean vet who has numbness and tissue loss in both feet because he had a cold weather injury in Korea, he gets zero disability under the Republican plan. This is not a way to treat our troops. And if you were in the Persian Gulf and have Persian Gulf War illness, and you can work with less than 50 percent of the efficiency you had before you went to war, you get no disability. The Republican plan gives very little support to those retirees who are on disability. My amendment gives full funding for disability of the retirees. Let us fund concurrent receipt. Let us vote for the Filner amendment.

We have just heard some very arcane rules that are never followed by the other side. They make waivers to legislation on an appropriations bill every day. There must be dozens in this bill today. Yet, you do not want to make the exception for a bill for our military retirees for their disability, their disability payments. Let the Nation know that on a technicality, the Republicans refused to fund concurrent receipt for our veterans.