



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 108th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

THURSDAY, October 30, 2003

House of Representatives

“NO” ON \$87 BILLION FOR IRAQ! “YES” ON \$500 MILLION FOR FIRESTORMS IN CALIFORNIA!

HON. BOB FILNER
OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MR. FILNER: Mr. Speaker, since the President first proposed his \$87 billion supplemental appropriations package last month, I have worried that the President's plan for bringing stability to Iraq lacks fiscal accountability and a clear plan for bringing our troops home, and has relied on U.S. troops taking almost all the risks, and American taxpayers paying virtually all the bills.

I have been angered by the repeated stories of our troops in Iraq not being outfitted with state-of-the-art Kevlar bulletproof vests and armored HMMVVs.

Equally troubling is the lack of parity for important funding at home. This bill sends direct aid to Iraq for infrastructure improvements that dwarf investments in our own country. The

bill spends nearly twice as much per capita for border protection and public safety services in Iraq as we spend at home, and 10 times more per capita in Iraq for new hospital facilities than we spend in the United States. In addition, this bill spends 11 times more per capita for sewer and water services than we invest in our own cities, and 350 times more per capita on rehabilitating Iraq's electric power infrastructure than we are spending on fixing similar problems here at home.

During the House's debate on this bill 2 weeks ago, I offered an amendment to add emergency funding for eliminating the “disabled veterans tax,” toppling an unfair law that prevents service disabled veterans from receiving their full military retired pay

(over)

and VA disability compensation. This amendment, ruled out of order by the Republican majority, drew attention to just one of the many infrastructure and social service spending shortfalls at home that are ignored in this emergency appropriations bill.

Two weeks ago, I voted “no” to giving the President a blank check for Iraq while falling behind in investing in our infrastructure and social service needs at home. Today, I will vote “yes” because of the terrible suffering and devastation endured by the citizens of San Diego County as a result of the firestorm still raging today; \$500 million has been added for Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) disaster assistance in California. Earlier this week, I contacted FEMA Director Michael Brown and President Bush, urging them to make a FEMA center operational immediately in San Diego, to help my constituents in processing the necessary paperwork to begin the process of rebuilding their lives. This important funding will allow FEMA to open one-

stop clearinghouses for information and assistance in expediting the huge volume of disaster claims that will result from this tragedy.

In addition, this bill increases funds to purchase body armor Special Armor Plate Inserts, and to increase production of armored HMMVVs, which will give our soldiers the protections they should have had all along. I have joined a number of my colleagues in calling for a full congressional hearing to investigate the many reports of American men and women fighting in Iraq without adequate lifesaving body armor--indication that our preparation for this war was inadequate.

Today, I vote “yes” because our soldiers serving in harm's way deserve the best protection and resources our Nation can provide. And because I know, in a very personal way, the suffering of San Diegans in the current firestorm and because I want to say “thank you” to the thousands of professional firefighters who exhibited so much bravery and courage in recent days.