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House of Representatives

SUPPORTING AND ENCOURAGING GREATER SUPPORT FOR VETERANS DAY EACH YEAR

HON. BOB FILNER

OF CALIFORNIA
IN THE HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, this is an important resolution, and we have heard the many reasons why, and I thank Mr. *Baca* for bringing this resolution to the floor. But after we give our speeches on Veterans Day, after we have given all the tributes, let's come back and do some real work that we have to do to really honor our veterans.

I agree with the gentleman from Arkansas. Let's pass that appropriations bill. If you add the money that is in the appropriations bill for 2008 with the continuing resolution we did earlier this year and the supplemental resolution we did earlier, we have added more than \$13 billion for the health care of our veterans for this year over last year. That is a 30 percent increase. That is unprecedented in the history of the VA and will put in place all the programs that many of us want and know that they are needed, deserved and earned.

But let's go further than that. Let's pass together a GI Bill for the 21st century, a bill that not only increases the benefits to a realistic fashion for education and home loans, but brings in the Guard and Reserve units to be eligible for the GI Bill's benefits. They are doing half the fighting in Iraq and yet do not have full benefits when they return home. So let us include the Guard and Reserve.

Let us include an absolute right to mental health treatment. We cannot neglect mental health, PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder), and other mental conditions. While we can deal with the visible wounds a lot easier, we cannot forget the invisible ones.

Let us work together to end that atrocious claims backlog. Over 600,000 claims for disability compensation are pending at the VA. People have died while waiting for their claim to be adjudicated. Others have lost their

home because they didn't have the income. We can cut through that bureaucracy, not just add, as the budget has, 1,000 more people, but really look at a whole new way, a nonadversarial way of dealing with the claims for disability. We can do that.

For too many people, VA means "veterans adversary." VA should mean "veterans advocate". We can do that. Let us make sure that every young man and woman that comes back from Iraq and Afghanistan is diagnosed for both traumatic brain injury and PTSD, post traumatic stress disorder. We are going to let tens of thousands of young men and women out of the service without adequately understanding these wounds, some of whose symptoms are invisible for some time. They are ticking time bombs that, coming back to society, will create enormous problems for our social structure. So let's diagnose it. Let's treat it early. Let's bring the family in. Let's make sure that we have treated the mental illness that is so prominent in a war like this that we are unfortunately pursuing.

Let us end homelessness for our veterans in America. We can do this. This is not rocket science. We know what it takes. We have all, as I said earlier, been to Stand-Downs. We know how to bring the community together to give homeless veterans the support they need to reintegrate. And I tell you, we are already seeing the problems that we saw in Vietnam. We have suicide rates of our current vets that are the highest rates since Vietnam. We have homeless Iraqi vets on the street. So let us not make the same mistake again that we did in Vietnam, but let us remember we have both new veterans and older veterans. We have to serve both. This Nation can do it, we should do it, and working together, we will do it.

Each year on Veterans Day, Americans come together to honor our Nation's heroes: the 25 million veterans that have served our country.

House Resolution 237 encourages Americans to demonstrate their support for veterans. It is important to let these heroes know that this grateful Nation honors their service to our country.

On this 88th Veterans Day, I urge all Americans to take the time to show appreciation to those who have answered the call to duty.

Although, we can never adequately thank them for their service and sacrifice to our Nation, today, on Veterans Day and everyday, we can humbly salute our brave veterans and soldiers.

Our nation has a proud legacy of supporting the men and women who have worn the uniform in defense of this country.

As a nation, we have a sacred pact with all those who served in uniform and we owe them a debt of gratitude.

Our country is founded on the principles of democracy, American values and faith that those who fight for freedom will defeat those whose cause is unjust.

I know I speak for the Nation when I say that we stand united behind our courageous men and women in uniform.

We must be united in seeing that every soldier, sailor, airman and marine is welcomed back with all the care and compassion this grateful Nation can bestow.

No other group of Americans has stood stronger and braver for our democracy than our troops and veterans.

Veterans Day should not be observed just once a year—our Nation’s heroes must be celebrated, honored and remembered for their service to our Nation—the whole year through.

Veterans have kept their promise to serve our Nation—and we, as a free and democratic country, must keep our promises to our veterans.

As Chairman of the Veterans’ Affairs Committee, it is my honor to serve the veterans of this Nation and I encourage my fellow Americans to do the same.

I encourage all Americans to reach out to veterans. Thank them and their families for their amazing sacrifice. Learn more about their great contributions to our country and gain the wisdom of their personal stories of our nation’s history.

Americans have learned, again, the truth behind the inscription on the Korean War Memorial—“Freedom is not free.” And no one has paid a higher price and sacrifice for our freedom than our veterans.

Pause to remember the noble service and high sacrifices of those who have worn this Nation’s uniform.

On Veterans Day and the whole year through, join me and take the time to show your gratitude to those who have answered the call to duty.