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House of Representatives

HONORING WOMEN IN THE ARMED FORCES AND FEMALE VETERANS

HON. BOB FILNER

OF CALIFORNIA
IN THE HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased, as a cosponsor of H. Res. 1054, to recognize the service and achievements of the women in the Armed Forces and the nation's women veterans. I thank my San Diego colleague, Congresswoman Susan Davis, for introducing this important resolution.

These women have been the unsung heroes of every war since the Revolutionary War. So, as we approach Memorial Day, it is fitting that we sing their praises. They are playing an increasingly prominent and important role in our nation's military forces. 350,000 are now serving, making up 15 percent of active duty personnel, 15 percent of Reserves, and 17 percent of the National Guard. More than 185,000 have been deployed since 2001.

Women veterans are second only to elderly veterans as the fastest growing segment of the veteran population. 255,000 women use VA health services today. There are 1.7 million women veterans, 7 percent of the total veteran population—expected to be 10 percent by 2020.

As Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, I want to report that Congress has responded to the challenge of meeting the needs of women veterans. Today, there exist within the Department of Veterans Affairs, two main offices specifically focused on

addressing the needs of women veterans, put into place by Congress.

The 102nd Congress passed landmark legislation (P.L. 102-484) which authorized VA to provide gender-specific health care at VA medical facilities. The position of Director of Women's Health was also created by this law. This position has recently been elevated to the Chief Consultant on Women Veterans' Health, Strategic Health Care Group, reporting to the Undersecretary for Health (of the Veterans Health Administration). At each medical center, a Women Veterans Program Manager is ready to assist women veterans with their health care.

More recently, Congress passed P.L. 108-422 to extend VA's authority to offer Military Sexual Trauma Counseling and Treatment to active duty service members.

In addition, The Center for Women Veterans was established by the 103rd Congress in P.L. 103-446 to oversee the Department's programs for women veterans. The Center Director reports to and is an advisor to the VA Secretary on matters related to policies, legislation, programs, issues and initiatives affecting women veterans. To name a few of its activities:

Perform outreach to minority women veterans, homeless women veterans with children, elderly women veterans, and women veterans living in rural areas.

Monitor transition assistance program (TAP) briefings to ensure that the gender-specific information about benefits and services is provided to women service members.

Monitor VA Office of Research and Development to ensure that VA research includes the issues of women veterans.

Their goal is to identify any programs that are unresponsive or insensitive to women veterans and to address their deficiencies. The center is concerned with Department-wide legislative policies, within the VHA and VBA (Veterans Benefits Administration) and NCA (National Cemetery Administration), as well as the State offices.

The center is holding the 4th National Summit on Women Veterans' Issues on June 20-22 in Washington, DC.

H.R. 4107, the Women's Veterans Health Care Improvements Act, has been introduced by my colleague serving on the VA Committee, Stephanie Herseth Sandlin. This is one of a number of ways that we are currently working on behalf of women veterans.

The House VA Committee continues to provide oversight to ensure that the laws we have passed are doing the job and that women veterans are receiving the information, benefits and care they deserve.

In the light of these actions by Congress, it is my hope that all women veterans will receive the care and benefits they have earned through their service and accomplishments that we recognize here today.