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## *House of Representatives*

# END VETERANS' HOMELESSNESS!

**HON. BOB FILNER**

OF CALIFORNIA  
IN THE HOUSE OF  
REPRESENTATIVES

Madam Speaker, this is the first of a series of six pieces of legislation that will benefit our Nation's veterans. This Congress, and certainly this committee, has been concerned with these veterans in our daily work, and we are proud to present these items which will help prevent veterans' homelessness, protect National Guard employment, help veterans keep their home, give veterans a cost-of-living adjustment.

Before I begin on this package, Madam Speaker, I just would like to briefly comment on a little item that came up yesterday during the debate on health care.

One of our veterans service organizations and the ranking member of our committee claimed that the bill that we would pass would hurt veterans' health care. I just want to point out on behalf of all the Chairs on this side of the aisle, all the legal opinions that have been made, veterans' health care is not affected by the health care bill that we passed. All the benefits will be retained. Nobody will be penalized for being part of the veterans health care system or any other part of veterans health benefits.

Congress actually received a letter yesterday from the Vietnam Veterans of America which said: "It is unfortunate that some continue to raise what is now even more clearly a false alarm that is apparently meant to frighten veterans and their families in order to prompt them to oppose the pending legislation. While there is a legitimate debate as to whether or not the pending health care measure should become law, Vietnam Veterans of America does not appreciate spreading rumors that are not accurate by any political partisan from any point of the political spectrum."

I just want to allay any fears that veterans have about this health care legislation. And certainly our committee, should anything arise that was unintended, we will move quickly to make sure that veterans health care is kept at a high quality and no one is penalized for having veterans health care in this country. So I want to point that out, Madam Speaker.

Now, to get back to the bill we have, H.R. 4810, under consideration. Almost half the homeless on the street tonight, Madam Speaker, are veterans—anywhere from 150,000 to 200,000. This is a national disgrace. It is our national disgrace. It's been an issue that I have been working on since I came to Congress when I joined the Committee on Veterans' Affairs almost 18 years ago. Now that the Democrats have the majority, we want to put forward a plan, as our Secretary of Veterans' Affairs has announced, a plan to end veterans' homeless within 5 years. Zero tolerance. That's going to be our policy.

Today we have the opportunity to take bold action to combat homelessness, but, as I said, we have a willing and eager administration to make sure that we achieve this goal. President Obama and his Secretary of Veterans' Affairs have, as I said, pledged to end homelessness over the next 5 years. Our Secretary has committed to expanding proven programs and launching innovative services to prevent veterans from falling into homelessness.

This bill before us, H.R. 4810, does three important things to provide the administration with the necessary tools to combat homelessness:

First, the bill would provide additional funding for the Grant and Per Diem Program, which provides grants to community agencies so they can, in turn, provide transitional housing, health services, and other supportive services to homeless veterans. Providing needed resources to the local agencies that care for our homeless veterans is just one way our grateful Nation can support the vital and compassionate work performed in communities all across the country.

Second, this bill helps low-income veteran families who are occupying permanent housing from becoming homeless by extending powerful and effective support services. Examples of these services include outreach, case management, and assistance in obtaining benefits from the VA, as well as public benefits from State and local agencies.

Finally, H.R. 4810 helps the increasing number of female veterans who end up being homeless. This is especially magnified for our women veterans coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan, who are four times more likely to become homeless than their male counterparts. My bill would direct the Department of Veterans Affairs to focus outreach efforts on homeless women veterans and homeless veterans with children.

This powerful bill is the result of significant work by the entire committee. I would like to thank the chairman of our Subcommittee on Health, Mike Michaud from Maine, and Ranking Member Henry Brown from South Carolina for the bipartisan leadership they demonstrated on this bill. I'd also like to recognize the important contributions of our col-

leagues Harry Teague of New Mexico, Ciro Rodriguez of Texas, and Phil Hare of Illinois. Each of these Members are true advocates for homeless veterans and introduced legislation helping homeless veterans that are now key provisions of this bill. I'd also like to thank our staff from the Health Committee, especially our staff director, Cathy Wiblemo, who has worked so hard on this legislation for such a long time.

There are hundreds of thousands of service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. It is our duty as a Nation, when we put our men and women in harm's way, to care for them when they return. We must also live up to the promise to honor the service and sacrifices of our veterans from previous conflicts. This is an opportunity today, Madam Speaker, to make a difference in the lives of veterans who are sleeping in cars, looking for public housing, searching for relief, and feeling helpless.

I urge all of our colleagues to pass H.R. 4810 to provide the help and support that our homeless veterans need and deserve.

Madam Speaker, a famous President once said: "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." The deputy ranking member—I didn't know we had such a title—is spreading fear, and I would just like to make it clear to every veteran, every family of veterans, and all Americans, there will be no reduction of any benefits of any veteran in the veterans health care system. There will be no taxes. There will be no diminution of services. Let's just make that clear.