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House of Representatives

Concurrent Receipt: Too Little, Too Late

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OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. FILNER: Mr. Speaker and colleagues, I rise today to protest the "compromise" provision included in the Defense Authorization Act regarding the issue known as concurrent receipt.

As we all know, current law requires an offset between military retired pay and VA disability compensation. In effect, our disabled military retirees are paying for their own disability!

Both the House and the Senate, in their versions of the Defense Authorization Act, passed significant and appropriate provisions to address this inequity. The Senate bill provided concurrent receipt for all veterans who were qualified to receive both military retired pay and VA disability compensation. The House bill provided it for those veterans with a disability rating of 60 percent or more.

Now, we come to the so-called "compromise" before us. A compromise, to me, means that you meet somewhere in the middle. This compromise does no such thing. It would set up an alternative "special pay" for only military retirees who have combat-related disabilities. These are military retirees with 20 years of service who also:

1. Have a Purple Heart and a disability rating of 10 percent or more for the condition for which they received the Purple Heart, or
2. Have another "qualifying combat-related disability" rated at least 60 percent.

I have heard that this "compromise" is being sold as a good first step. It is not a good first step. It is hardly a step at all.

During my ten years in Congress, I cannot recall more than one or two other issues besides concurrent receipt on which I have received so many letters, e-mails, and calls. The expectations of our military retirees have been raised by the House and Senate versions of this bill. It is a disservice to give so little to so few at the last minute. While these veterans with combat-related disabilities are absolutely deserving of recognition, so are the others whom we have been fighting for!

I understand that it is expensive to pass concurrent receipt. But disabled veterans did not hesitate when called to serve. They returned home with disabilities they have had to live with ever since. How can we even doubt the need to keep our promises and give them what they deserve? They earned their military retired pay. They deserve their VA disability compensation. The "compromise" that is before us today is a disgrace.