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## *House of Representatives*

# OUR VETERANS DESERVE NO LESS!!

**HON. BOB FILNER**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**MR. FILNER:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman (Mr. Shows) for yielding me time, I thank the chairman for bringing us this bill, and I thank especially the chairman of the Subcommittee on Health of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. Moran), for making sure that we had this bill passed this coming year.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard about how necessary this construction is for the VA and how critical the construction needs are for our health facilities. There has been a gross underfunding of VA facilities for the past decade, and this is meant to start to catch up.

The average age of our VA facilities is over a half century old. An aging infrastructure, like aging bodies, needs more than a band-aid and an aspirin. So this would allow

the VA to carry out 10 major construction projects.

I was pleased to know that 3 of these are in California, as the chairman of the Subcommittee on Health of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs said, in San Francisco and Los Angeles and in my hometown of San Diego, and I am pleased and relieved that we are able to do this for the San Diego Medical Center in San Diego County. In fact, this is one of the 6 health care facilities that will be authorized to meet safety codes in the event of an earthquake. The projects would improve the structural integrity of a building that serves a growing metropolitan veteran population growing each year and houses almost 2,500 VA employees.

This bill would also raise the threshold for what are called major construction projects to those that cost

more than \$6 million, thus allowing the Secretary more flexibility for approving minor construction project and keeping pace with the rising cost of construction across the country. I believe that we have an obligation to help the VA maintain a safe and decent health care system.

I would also urge our committee to consider legislation down the line to meet new needs in our National Cemetery System. While the VA does not have enough funds to meet the needs around the country, I would urge upon our committee to examine new ways of looking at this. For example, in San Diego, 2 private cemeteries have agreed to cede over to the Veterans Administration land

on which veterans from San Diego could be buried. We have called these satellite cemeteries, and we will be introducing legislation to try to get these authorized in the coming year.

While the VA administration has tentatively said that that gives them new bureaucratic problems, I believe that veterans around this Nation deserve an honorable burial right in their hometowns. If we have to find new ways to do that, then this House ought to do that.

So, Mr. Speaker, we are here to approve H.R. 4514. Our veterans deserve no less, and I urge my colleagues to support this important measure.