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House of Representatives

CALLING ON REPUBLICAN LEADERSHIP TO BRING H.R. 303, A BILL TO END CONCURRENT RECEIPT, TO THE FLOOR OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

HON. BOB FILNER
OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MR. FILNER: Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from California (Ms. Waters) for taking the leadership on this, as she has done on so many issues in this Congress.

I want to add my voice to urge all of our colleagues to listen to the voice of our veterans. Find it in your hearts once and for all, to remove this unjust disabled veterans tax.

A resident of my congressional district, the 51st in California, in San Diego, named Miguel Gonzalez, was wounded in service and declared eligible for VA disability compensation. After retiring from the military, he was also entitled to his retired pay, as every American is entitled to their retired pay. But unlike every other Federal employee, Mr. Speaker, for every dollar that he receives in his disability compensation, he gives

back to the government a dollar from his retirement. What an unfair and demoralizing tax on the bravest and best in our Nation.

Today this tax is especially galling as we ask and expect our young men and women to fight the threats of terrorism. There has recently been an uproar, justifiably, about the charge that wounded service-members were billed for their hospital bills as they lay recovering from their wounds. They got a bill for the food while they were in the hospital.

I cannot see any difference between that case and the case we are talking about this evening, except that the disabled veterans tax costs our service-members much more than the hospital bill that we were so upset by. Why are we expecting the young men and women who spent the better part of their lives in service to their

(over)

country to pay for their own retirement? It does not make sense, and it is an insult to these veterans.

Last year we passed this concurrent receipt in the House and in the Senate, and in a secret conference committee backed by the President of the United States, it was removed. The will of the Congress, the will of the American people was frustrated by a secret meeting of a few people in concert with the White House.

Now we are trying a new process: 200 of our colleagues have signed the discharge petition, a process to get this to a vote in spite of the leadership's unwillingness to do so. With 218 signatures, we can move this bill from the committee where it is stalled, to the full House of Representatives for a vote. We know it will pass, 370 members of this body have already signed on to it. A lot of them do not seem to have the courage to sign the discharge petition and that should not even be necessary.

It is shameful that we must resort to such a means to get a vote on this bill, which would end this disabled veterans tax.

We are told that this bill will cost money. What does not? But it is a matter of priorities. We are willing to give our troops everything for their fighting in Iraq, now it is \$87 billion for the next few months, but why are we not willing to give them all they need when they return home? What is our highest priority if not caring for our Nation's veterans? It seems to be tax cuts for the wealthiest of us all.

We must send a message to the men and women who right this moment are fighting in Iraq. They did not hesitate when called to duty. Many are serving much longer than anticipated. Some are returning home with disabilities that they will have to live with for the rest of their life.

What kind of nation are we? We must tell them that we value their service and that we value them. We must let them know that their Nation will honor them, not just in word, but in deed. Service-connected disabled military retirees, I think we all know, have earned their retirement pay. They deserve their disability compensation. Let us not make them wait any longer for justice to prevail. We must end the disabled veterans tax.