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House of Representatives

PROVIDING FOR CONCURRENCE BY HOUSE WITH AMENDMENTS IN SENATE AMENDMENT TO H.R. 797, DR. JAMES ALLEN VETERAN VISION EQUITY ACT OF 2007

HON. BOB FILNER

OF CALIFORNIA
IN THE HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the Dr. James Allen Veteran Vision Equity Act of 2007.

I was glad to be able to work with my colleagues on the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, on both sides of the aisle and in both Houses, to get here. I want to thank Mr. *Rangel* and his staff for their guidance on the provision that fell under the jurisdiction of the Ways and Means Committee.

I especially want to thank our colleague from Madison, Wisconsin, Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin, who led the effort for this, who got it to the floor today and who will

explain it in whatever detail she thinks is important.

I note that this bill was previously introduced in the last Congress; however, it never became law. I am glad this Congress has the opportunity to do more for our blind and vision impaired veterans.

The Dr. James Allen Veteran Vision Equity Act of 2007, named after a noted physician and ocular pioneer who worked for over 35 years in the VA, would allow veterans who receive veterans' disability compensation for impairment of vision in one eye to be eligible to receive additional disability compensation

for impairment of vision in the eye that is not service-connected, where the impairment in each eye is to a visual acuity of 20/200 or less or of a peripheral field of 20 degrees or less (the definition of “legal blindness” adopted by all 50 states and the Social Security Administration.)

H.R. 797 also directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and the Secretary of Health and Human Services to match and compare VA needs-based pension benefits data, parents’ dependency and indemnity compensation data, health-care services data, and unemployability compensation data with the National Directory of New Hires maintained by DHHS, for the purpose of determining eligibility for such benefits and services.

It would also authorize \$5 million for establishing, improving and expanding for the operation and maintenance of state-owned veterans’ cemeteries. Additionally, the bill will repeal the time limitation for States to file for reimbursement costs for interring unclaimed veterans’ remains, making it retroactive to October 1, 2006.

Finally, this measure extends the authorization of the veterans work study program until 2010.

This bill affects an estimated 5 percent of the 13,109 veterans who have service-connected blindness or loss of vision in one eye. As of September 17, 2007, 1,129 service members have sustained serious eye wounds in combat according to the Defense Armed Forces Institute of Surgical Pathology (any of which may later lead to blindness).

Also, it is reported that many of the over 4,400 traumatic brain-injured OIF/OEF servicemembers will likely suffer from serious vision-related complications and at least 57 percent of all eye injuries of this war are caused by IED explosions.

Walter Reed Army Medical Center alone has treated close to 540 Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom service members for visual injuries and over 230 of our soldiers unfortunately have sustained legal blindness in one eye.

It is worth noting, that in 2002, Congress passed and the President signed Public Law 107-330, which included a provision to correct a similar deficiency in the Paired Organ law for hearing loss. In 2006, the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs held a legislative hearing and received favorable testimony on H.R. 2963, a bill similar to H.R. 797. In that hearing, the VA supported H.R. 2963.

This is important and meaningful legislation for our men and women in uniform—who have fought and are fighting for our country.

I urge my colleagues to support passage of this resolution and urge swift consideration of the Dr. James Allen Veteran Vision Equity Act of 2007 by the Senate before the end of this session of Congress....

Mr. Speaker, at this time I will include in the *Record* an article published in the *Ophthalmic News* on protective eye gear, and I urge my colleagues to unanimously support this resolution.