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## *House of Representatives*

# PROTECTING OUR MINORITY VETERANS!

**HON. BOB FILNER**

OF CALIFORNIA  
IN THE HOUSE OF  
REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. FILNER. This bill comes to us from our colleague from Chicago, Congressman Luis Gutierrez, and this would repeal the law that requires the termination of the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans on December 31 of 2009. We cannot let this important committee vanish.

Today, Mr. Speaker, over 14 percent of veterans are from racial or ethnic minority groups. African Americans comprise about 10 percent. The rest are Hispanic, Asian, or Native American. However, the Census Bureau projects that the number of minority Americans will shift significantly in the future and will grow to about 35 percent of the total population by 2050. Undoubtedly, that will be reflected in the percentage of people of color in the military, which is already steadily on the rise.

This trend has been true for black women who are joining the military at a greater rate than they are represented in the overall population and in a greater ratio than their male counterparts. In fact, black women comprise almost 35 percent of female service members. This pattern will affect the VA's mission and scope, and it must be prepared to respond to properly deliver benefits.

Congress developed the Center for Minority Veterans and the Advisory Committee in 1994 to advise VA and Congress on providing health care and delivering benefits to minority

veterans because there were disparities in such service. We had hoped to improve VA practices for future generations of minority veterans. This center has issued an annual report since 1994, and it's mandated to focus specific attention on African American, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, and Pacific Islanders, which it has done by conducting town hall meetings and site visits to such places as inner city Los Angeles and Native American tribes in Alaska.

The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs has explored these disparities and has been greatly assisted by the Committee on Minority Veterans. Its recommendations regarding outreach, research, education, staff diversity, translation services, and housing have been extremely enlightening and have resulted in many improvements.

At the present time, the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans is due to sunset in 2009. This bill would prevent this from occurring and would serve to bring permanent awareness to cultural, racial, and ethnic issues among veterans to Congress and VA leadership.

I urge this Congress to support the bill and allow the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans to continue its work uninterrupted and fully supported.