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House of Representatives

VETERANS SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION AND HEALTH CARE ENHANCEMENT ACT!

HON. BOB FILNER

OF CALIFORNIA
IN THE HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES

Madam Speaker, Obviously, nothing is more important than the safety of our veterans; and this bill, H.R. 2074, contains many provisions to help improve the safety and health care of our veterans.

Because of a report I requested as chair, the GAO presenter "VA Health Care: Actions Needed to Prevent Sexual Assaults and Other Safety Incidents." That report found that veterans and employees were exposed to personal dangers, including sexual assaults, in the very facilities that should be protecting them.

And, Madam Speaker, I think we ought to be more outraged given the findings of that report. That report found that there were not just dozens of alleged sexual assaults that went unreported, not even scores of such assaults, but hundreds of them—hundreds of sexual assaults alleged but not reported by those who had the obligation and responsibility to report them.

How are our veterans protected when they can't even have a report of an alleged assault? What message does that give to people that the military & the VA care about what's going on here and what's going on with their safety? That's who we should be going after here, by the way. It's very clear who has the responsibility about reporting such assaults, and yet they were not reported in the hundreds of cases, and that was only, by the way, at some selected study places. Who knows what we would have found in the whole institution?

I don't know that the VA has ever reprimanded any of those people. I don't know that the VA has ever said to the Veterans Administration that this will not be tolerated, that not only are we going to report on them, but investigate them and bring people to justice. I don't know that any of that has happened. That's what this bill should be trying to focus on. What

happens to those people who don't report them? What happens to the cover-ups? What happens to those who protect each other as people are assaulted?

I'm not sure that we have come to grips with this issue. This report was outrageous. This report was incredibly, incredibly tragic. And all I find is we are going to do some process changes in here—and I support those, and we'll vote for the bill. But we're sending a message here to the entire 250,000 working people of this VA that we're not really concerned about them, we're not reporting them, we're not getting to those people covering up, we're not getting at those people who protect each other, we're not getting at those who have violated the law by not reporting such incidents.

Let's go after them. Let's give our veterans some comfort that their safety is protected.