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House of Representatives

VETERANS OPPORTUNITY TO WORK ACT OF 2011!

HON. BOB FILNER

OF CALIFORNIA
IN THE HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES

Madam Speaker, I think the whole committee, and certainly the chairman and I, agree that putting veterans to work, especially at a time of high unemployment in general, should be one of the chief goals not only of this committee but of the entire Congress and our Nation. And when we may have, for example, double or even triple the already tragic unemployment rate for veterans, it becomes that much more important.

Now I've heard descriptions of this bill as comprehensive and as meaningful. And I was looking forward to this VOW bill, the Veterans Opportunity to Work. I was hoping it would be a WOW bill—that is, a wonderful opportunity to work—but it seems it has become, and remains so, the HOW bill—how are we going to put anybody to work with this bill?

Let me try to make that clear, Madam Speaker. Throughout the whole committee process that this bill went through, I described it as one that did not create jobs, but actually taxed veterans. Taxed veterans. Remember

that, Madam Speaker. You took a pledge not to vote for anything that taxed anybody. This bill does. It actually taxes one group of veterans to help some other group of veterans. And I still feel the same way about the bill as it came through the process. Now I support all programs that will help veterans and improve their lives, and I know this bill is called a jobs bill. But, it is merely a retraining bill. Retraining.

Now, we all want retraining, and we all know it's important. But I want to get people a job. I don't just want to retrain them and call this some great bill. My concern is that this bill will not get veterans hired at all. It may retrain them, who knows, but they'll have no place to get a job. And we'll have taxed one set of veterans to pay for their retraining—an increased tax, for all of you who took the pledge not to increase taxes.

Now I think we have to support the spirit of the bill of retraining and try to find proper funding in a bipartisan way, and I hope that working with our

Senate counterparts we can do that. We need proper funding for all of these programs that are so good. But the gentleman and his party don't want to ask for more money from anybody, even our millionaires. They want to tax one group of veterans who are trying to buy homes, and so they'll train this group of veterans and claim they're creating jobs. Now, that's not what we should be doing here in this Congress.

This bill will actually diminish services to our veterans. I know that my counterparts, for example, want the so-called TAP classes, the Transition Assistance Program classes, contracted out. But I don't think the time is right to do that. So how do we pay for this bill for retraining, this VOW bill that should've been a WOW bill but is only a HOW bill? It says to those who want to buy a home through the VA housing program that your fees, which were scheduled to go down, will not now go down. They're going to be kept high. This refusal to extend a tax decrease has always been described by the party over there as a tax increase, so I will keep your language. You are

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increasing the taxes on one group of veterans who want to buy homes to pay for this retraining bill which may not get anybody a job.

Now, I know, Madam Speaker, you're going to tell Grover Norquist what's going on here, get hold of him right away, because this is a violation of the pledge that he is requiring of all of the Republicans: don't raise taxes. And in his definition of raising taxes, it's extending fees that were going to go down that now don't go down. So that's an increase in taxes.

So let's remember this when we think about the VOW bill. Let's vow to say we want to put people to work, we don't want to raise taxes. But this bill does neither. It not only doesn't put people to work, it raises taxes. So I cannot support the bill, Madam Speaker.