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House of Representatives

ENSURING EQUALITY FOR FEDERAL OFFICERS!

HON. BOB FILNER

OF CALIFORNIA
IN THE HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. Speaker, I recently reintroduced The Law Enforcement Officers Equity Act, H.R. 327. The purpose of this bill is simply to give law enforcement status to all federal law enforcement officers.

Many federal officials—for example, the Border Patrol—are classified as “law enforcement officers,” for the purposes of determining salary and retirement benefits. But many other officers, such as Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Inspectors, Veterans’ Affairs Police Officers, U.S. Mint Police Officers, Internal Revenue Officers, Customs and Border Protection Seized Property Specialists, and police officers in about two dozen other agencies do not have equal pay and benefits status.

The tragic irony is that the only time these officers are classified as law enforcement officers is when they are killed in the line of duty. Then their

names are inscribed on the wall of the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial right here in Washington.

Let me say that again. It is only when they are killed that they are called law enforcement officers, and that is a tragic irony.

My district encompasses the entire California - Mexico border and is home to two of the busiest border crossings in the entire world, so I am very familiar with the work of our nation’s border inspectors. They wear bulletproof vests, they carry firearms, and, unfortunately, have to use them. Most importantly, these inspectors are subject to the same risks as other officers with whom they serve side-by-side. However, they are not eligible for early retirement and other benefits, which are designed to maintain a young and vigorous law enforcement workforce that we need to combat those who pose life-threatening risks to our society.

The Law Enforcement Officers Equity Act will provide well-deserved pay and retirement benefits to the officers protecting our borders, our ports of entry, our military and veterans’ installations and other sensitive government buildings. The costs of these benefits would likely be off-set by savings in training costs and increased revenue collection. The bill will also reduce turnover, increase yield, decrease recruitment and development costs and enhance the retention of a well-trained and experienced workforce.

The simple fact is that these officers have dangerous jobs and deserve to be recognized as law enforcement officers, just like others with whom they serve, side by side, and who share the same level of risk. I encourage my colleagues to join me in supporting the Law Enforcement Officers Equity Act. The valiant officers who protect us deserve no less.