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House of Representatives

FILNER DEMANDS ADDITIONAL \$3.1 BILLION FOR VETERANS' HEALTH CARE!

HON. BOB FILNER

OF CALIFORNIA
IN THE HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. **FILNER**. Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment which I am labeling an emergency amendment. It is an emergency amendment because the money is needed for the veterans of this Nation, especially those who are returning from the war in Iraq and Afghanistan who may not be able to get the services they need for a variety of wounds, both physical and mental.

Let me first say where I got the number of \$3.1 billion. It is not just a figure grabbed from the air. Every year the veterans service organizations of this Nation put together a budget called the Independent Budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs. This is the one for 2006. What it says is that just to keep meeting the needs for our current veterans and those who we expect to see in the coming year, we will need an additional \$3.1 billion than was allocated by the President in his budget. We do not know what this House will adopt yet, so this figure is drawn from the inadequacies of the President's budget as he gave it to Congress recently.

This is a supplemental budget for those fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. At least that is the title. Let me make sure all the people of the House understand the relevance of the veterans budget for the war that we are fighting abroad. Here is what our first President, George Washington, said and it has never been done more eloquently: "The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional as to how they perceive the veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their country."

Mr. Chairman, the morale of our troops overseas depends on how we are going to treat their comrades when they return and how we treat their comrades who served in earlier battles. We are not treating them to the level that is worthy of their sacrifice. Whether you look at the amount of nurses, whether you look at research funds, whether you look at the resources for post-traumatic stress disorder for which virtually every returning soldier, Marine who is in Iraq and Afghanistan may have, wherever you look,

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there is a deficiency in this veterans budget.

I call that an emergency. I call that important to the struggle that is being waged overseas. If you are voting for that struggle, you have to vote to make sure the veterans who come back from that struggle are well treated.

Right now we have a proposal from the President which advocates a mere one-half of 1 percent increase in the veterans health care budget over the previous year. That is a real cut, because of health inflation and the advancing age and the needs of the population, to about a 14 or 15 percent cut by the administration's own figures. So we are cutting in real terms 15 percent from the veterans health care budget.

How does the administration want to fund that cut? Doubling the copayments for prescription drugs, adding an enrollment fee of up to \$250 for those in the so-called lower categories of veterans preference. That is outrageous. That is unconscionable to charge the veterans of this Nation for their own health care and to balance the budget on the backs of these veterans.

The chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs was not satisfied with having a \$250 enrollment fee. He proposed doubling it to almost \$500 for some of these veterans. These veterans are supposedly in lower categories, either because of the nature of their illness or their income. But, Madam Chairman, this Nation, this Congress has the funds to help all of these veterans to get the care that they need.

Let me remind my colleagues, this is a \$2.5 trillion budget that we are operating within our Nation. We have about a \$400 billion deficit, a \$7.5 trillion debt. We are spending several billion dollars a week in Iraq. Yet someone is going to say that we do not have the \$3 billion that is necessary for our veterans? I reject that argument because this is a Nation that is worthy of its veterans. This a Nation that could put the money where it is needed. And this is a Nation that can do what is required for our veterans.

We simply cannot charge these copayments. We simply cannot charge this enrollment fee. We simply cannot continue to have a VA that is gagged from informing veterans of their rights under law. That is what is happening in the VA today. My amendment to provide \$3 billion extra will correct that injustice.

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. LEWIS of California. Madam Chairman, I am very empathetic to the concerns of the gentleman from California. We expect fully to address those concerns in regular order. Therefore, I make a point of order against the amendment because it proposes to change existing law and constitutes legislation in an appropriation bill and therefore violates clause 2 of rule XXI. The rule states in pertinent part: "An amendment to a general appropriation bill shall not be in order if changing existing law." The amendment includes an emergency designation and as such constitutes legislation in violation of clause 2 of rule XXI.

I ask for a ruling from the Chair.

[Time: 15:30]

The Acting CHAIRMAN (Mrs. Biggert). Does any Member wish to be heard on the point of order?

Mr. FILNER. Madam Chairman, I know how reluctant the chairman is. This is a supplemental budget. By definition it goes beyond whatever we did in the previous year. That is why it is called a supplemental. And by some technical mumbo jumbo, he has managed to say that this supplemental is not subject to the rule that he just read. Through technicalities, through arcane kinds of things, he is saying that the veterans of this Nation are not entitled to this care because he is using a rule which is not being used for the \$81 billion that we have on the floor but is used for this \$3 billion that we are trying to use for our Nation's veterans.

Madam Chairman, I understand these rules, and I understand these technical points of order. They

are designed to protect certain amendments and not have others. Fine. But when one uses that rule to shut out the veterans of this Nation, to shut out the troops that are coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan, from the care that they deserve and will need, we are going to shut down PTSD programs, Madam Chairman, all across this Nation, and yet every soldier and Marine is going to come back with potentially that disorder.

So one can use all the rules, but what we are doing here is immoral, it is unconscionable, it is outrageous that we would be treating the veterans in this way.

The Acting CHAIRMAN. Does any Member wish to be heard on the point of order?

Mr. LEWIS of California. Madam Chairman, speaking further on the point of order, I would simply, calmly say to the gentleman that I very much agree, as the entire House agrees, that we must be responsive to the medical needs of our veterans, especially those who are coming back at this very moment. There is not any doubt that the new Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Subcommittee is designed in the fashion to be very responsive to the needs of veterans. I urge the gentleman to recognize that we have begun hearings in connection with that already. It is our intention in regular order to move these bills very quickly, and there is absolutely no doubt that the needs of these veterans, beyond money that is already in the pipeline, will be met as a result of regular order.

Mr. FILNER. Madam Chairman, I understand what the chairman is saying. I have been around here long enough. I do not have confidence in

that regular order. I know what is going to happen then. Then we will be accused of legislating on appropriations or some other rule will be brought up. So I do not accept the ruling. I intend to challenge the ruling, and I think we owe this to our veterans.

The Acting CHAIRMAN. If no other Member wishes to be heard, the Chair is prepared to rule.

The Chair finds that this amendment includes an emergency designation. The amendment therefore constitutes legislation in violation of clause 2 of rule XXI.

The point of order is sustained. The amendment is not in order.

Mr. FILNER. Madam Chairman, I move to appeal the ruling of the Chair.

The Acting CHAIRMAN. The question is, Shall the decision of the Chair stand as the judgment of the Committee of the Whole?

The question was taken; and the Acting Chairman announced that the ayes appeared to have it.

RECORDED VOTE

Mr. FILNER. Madam Chairman, I demand a recorded vote.

A recorded vote was ordered.

The vote was taken by electronic device, and there were--ayes 224, noes 200, not voting 10.

So the decision of the Chair stands as the judgment of the Committee.

The result of the vote was announced as above recorded.