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## *House of Representatives*

# KEEPING OUR PROMISE TO OUR DISABLED VETERANS

**HON. BOB FILNER**  
OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**MR. FILNER:** Mr. Speaker and colleagues, I rise to call the attention of the House to three bills that I have introduced to address concerns of our nation's disabled veterans. Each of the bills was introduced in response to requests from veterans all across the nation.

H.R. 1919 will authorize transportation on military aircraft on a space-available basis for veterans with a service-connected disability rated at 50% or more. Currently, members and retirees of the uniformed services and the reserves may travel free on Department of Defense (DOD) aircraft when space is available. This benefit is allowed when it does not interfere with military missions and is a recognition of military careers filled with rigorous duty.

But present policies do not extend this benefit to our disabled veterans. What more rigorous duty can be imagined than to become disabled in the service of our country? Why has the DOD chosen not to recognize the brave men and women who sacrificed their health and well-being while serving in uniform? This DOD policy is wrong, and H.R. 1919 would correct it.

This bill would cost the federal government nothing, and adding disabled veterans would not interfere with benefits for active-duty

personnel. Current military is always given priority, and H.R. 1919 would do nothing to change that. What my bill would do is to allow seats that would otherwise go unused to be occupied by men and women who have been disabled in their service to their nation.

Two other bills, H.R. 1917 and H.R. 1918, would also allow veterans with service-connected disabilities to use military facilities.

The DOD provides Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) programs to bring some of the benefits of civilian life to military communities. These programs are the cornerstone of community quality of life, providing for fitness, recreation, libraries, sports and athletic programs. DOD considers MWR programs as critical to mission readiness and productivity--these programs contribute to physical fitness and recruitment and retention of personnel.

In addition, civilian employees and their families are allowed access as a perk of their employee benefit package. Other groups, such as the Scouts of America, can also utilize the lands by getting special permission. In contrast, most of the over 2 million disabled veterans (rated 0% to 90% disabled) are currently deemed not disabled enough to be

considered a patron of MWR. My bill, H.R. 1917, would fix that!

A third bill, H.R. 1918, would extend commissary and exchange store privileges to service-disabled veterans with a rating of 30% or more and their families. Congress must do all we reasonably can for the men and women in uniform who have become disabled in service to our nation. Our disabled veterans are important members of a greater military family, and they should be treated as such with every available opportunity.

I believe that changing these policies\_use of military recreational lands, transportation on military aircraft, and commissary privileges-are the right steps to take for our disabled veterans! They have sacrificed their health and well-being for their country, and I believe that they have earned the right to these privileges. Please join with me by co-sponsoring these three bills and working for their passage.