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House of Representatives

Budget Resolution Offers Inadequate Funding to Veterans Programs

HON. BOB FILNER
OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. FILNER: Mr. Chairman, I rise to voice my concern about the budget resolution before us today. As a Member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, I am especially concerned about the amount of funding included in the budget resolution for our Nation's veterans.

This Republican budget is woefully short of what is needed, and I urge my colleagues to support the Democratic budget alternative. Our alternative provides \$32 billion more than the Republican budget over the next 10 years for veterans. This means providing \$17 billion more for veterans' health care and rejecting the Republican cut of \$15 billion for mandatory veterans' programs, programs like service-connected disability compensation, pensions, survivors' benefits, vocational rehabilitation, educational and burial benefits. I cannot imagine even thinking about cuts to compensation for our disabled veterans!

The Democratic budget is supported by the authors of the Independent Budget, a budget created by veterans' service organizations who are on the front lines and in a position to know exactly what is needed. They call the Democratic alternative "a solid step forward in meeting the very real needs of veterans".

This morning I attended the joint Senate and House VA Committee hearing, where we heard views on the budget from the Vietnam Veterans of America, the American Ex-Prisoners of War,

the Military Officers Association of American, and AMVETS. I must report that for much of the hearing, there were only two Members present to receive the veterans' testimony.

On the day following the beginning of the war with Iraq, it is hard to believe that most of the Members of the VA Committee were too busy to attend this hearing about funding for our veterans' programs. Perhaps our Republican colleagues were reworking their original budget resolution, working to respond to the outcries from veterans and the public about their original budget resolution. But the final result before us today is still woefully inadequate.

Mr. Chairman, as we send our young men and women to war in Iraq, certain to result in disability for some young Americans, we unfortunately are simultaneously sending the message that Congress is not concerned about their future as veterans! This is unconscionable.

Why does the Republican budget proposal fail to fund veterans programs at the level recommended by the Independent Budget? I am sad that it is largely because Congress is poised to give a tax break to the wealthiest Americans.

Who deserves to receive the benefits of the national treasury--America's disabled veterans or America's millionaires?

I urge my colleagues to reject this budget resolution.

