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House of Representatives

HIRE VETERANS FIRST!

HON. BOB FILNER

OF CALIFORNIA
IN THE HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. **FILNER**. Mr. Chairman, I call this the "Let U.S. Veterans Rebuild Iraq and Afghanistan" amendment. Once again, I rise in support of the veterans of our Nation. We have a major, major, major operation in Iraq and Afghanistan. The bill on the floor today appropriates a sum of \$81 billion, and we will be spending over \$200 billion. It seems to me that we ought to guarantee jobs to veterans with companies that are awarded government contracts from this fund. Our active duty are fighting, but those who volunteer to go and help in other ways should have the preference that their veterans' service offers.

We have all rallied to support our troops, but often after they come home, our veterans are not treated with the respect they deserve. I outlined yesterday the lack of respect that they will have and continue to have because of lack of adequate funding in the health care system. PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder, for example, will not have the funding that is needed to treat what is expected to arise out of the current war. As I said yesterday, research funds are being cut, nurses' positions are being cut.

I tried yesterday to put an amendment on the floor that would supplement this supplemental

with an additional \$3 billion that the veterans groups think and have testified and have outlined is necessary. That \$3 billion was not added in yesterday's supplemental. So today I ask that we ensure that there are jobs for our Nation's veterans, whether they are new or old. Let us give them the preference that they have in law at home with the preference for the contracts that are being awarded with such abandon in the Middle East today.

We know, if we do not serve our veterans with jobs or health care, what occurs. We know that up to half of the homeless on the streets today are veterans, mainly from Vietnam, because we did not give them the honor, the respect, the health care, the jobs, the housing that they needed. And so they are on the street after having fought for this country. One way to make sure that this does not happen to anyone else is to include veterans in the rebuilding of Iraq and Afghanistan. Many of them fought for freedom for those nations. Let us get them involved in the effort to build the future.

Mr. Chairman, I hope that the rules are not invoked here once again to stop a commonsense approach to helping our veterans in this Nation.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. LEWIS of California. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chairman, the gentleman's amendment is most intriguing. The gentleman is interested in having opportunity for veterans to gain employment. I presume they are veterans, whether veterans of World War II or circumstances in Iraq or otherwise. I presume that is the case. I certainly would be supportive of ensuring every veteran has an opportunity to find work, wherever the veteran might have served. I would like to engage in a colloquy with the gentleman.

Yesterday we had a discussion on the floor of the House relative to the gentleman's wanting to ensure there were additional funding flows for veterans. There was some resistance to that suggestion because some of us thought there was money in the pipeline that adequately serviced the hospitals; and in regular order we would make sure whatever was necessary would be available, at future hearings and markups of bills that affect funding. So I want to ask a question: There is a veterans hospital in San Diego County, is there not?

Mr. FILNER. Of course.

Mr. LEWIS of California. Mr. Chairman, I am trying to remember, what is the name of that hospital. I am trying to remember.

Mr. FILNER. La Jolla.

Mr. LEWIS of California. San Diego Veterans Medical Center in La Jolla. And does it happen to be in the gentleman's district?

Mr. FILNER. No, it is not.

Mr. LEWIS of California. Mr. Chairman, it is my understanding that hospital needs a lot of work. I assume the gentleman suggests that veterans ought to be first in line if we do some refurbishing?

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Chairman, in last year's appropriation bill, that hospital was awarded close to \$100 million for seismic refitting, retrofitting for earthquake safety.

Mr. LEWIS of California. And was the gentleman involved in that?

Mr. FILNER. Yes, sir.

Mr. LEWIS of California. Mr. Chairman, I would ask the gentleman, did we successfully get money for that seismic retrofitting?

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Chairman, yes, in last year's appropriation bill, La Jolla Medical Center was one of a variety of hospitals, I think about two dozen.

Mr. LEWIS of California. Mr. Chairman, I wish the gentleman would have discussed that with me at the time.

We had a similar problem at Loma Linda Veterans Medical Center, the sister hospital of the Jerry Pettis Veterans Hospital, and we found a way to do seismic retrofitting by way of using a laser. No portion of the hospital needs to be closed down while the work is being done. Thereby, patients can actually be in the hospital while the work is being done. We did not have that discussion.

Mr. Chairman, has the gentleman visited that hospital in the last years?

Mr. FILNER. Many times.

Mr. LEWIS of California. In the last year?

Mr. FILNER. Yes, sir.

Mr. LEWIS of California. Mr. Chairman, I attempt to visit my hospital regularly as well. And, indeed, visit the veterans who are now back at Walter Reed or Bethesda. Indeed, we all should be concerned about that priority.

But, frankly, I am a bit incensed by the gentleman's suggestion yesterday that would indicate that we do not give priority on a

bipartisan basis to veterans. I would ask the gentleman to join me in a special mission. Would the gentleman consider the mission?

Mr. **FILNER**. Mr. Chairman, whatever the gentleman from California (Chairman *Lewis*) suggests, I would consider.

Mr. **LEWIS** of California. Mr. Chairman, the mission is the veterans service organizations are a great voice for veterans here in Washington. Like the gentleman, they are constantly pounding their chest saying, I am calling for money, more opportunity for veterans. I insist that they help us go back to where the hospitals are and see that veterans are treated like real human beings in those hospitals. I cannot get the VSOs to do it. Maybe I can get the gentleman to do it because the gentleman is obviously more concerned than the VSOs are about those veterans benefits and the way they are being treated.

Mr. Chairman, I ask, would the gentleman from California (Mr. *Filner*) join me in that effort, or does the gentleman believe the money is being spent very well at veterans hospitals?

Mr. **FILNER**. Mr. Chairman, if the gentleman would continue to yield, look, everybody wants efficiencies in this system; but I will say, for a paralyzed veteran with a spinal cord injury, there is no better place than the VA to get care.

[Time: 10:45]

To keep that quality of care for those veterans requires investment in our system. We are all looking for efficiencies but I will tell you there is no independent person, including the VA.

Mr. **LEWIS** of California. Mr. Chairman, I reclaim my time.

Mr. **FILNER**. Mr. Chairman, the gentleman asked me a question.

Including the VA that says that we have enough money.

Mr. **LEWIS** of California. Who says we do not have enough money?

Mr. **FILNER**. The VA says we do not have enough money.....

The **CHAIRMAN**. The gentleman will suspend.

The Chair has been trying to facilitate this colloquy, but the Chair will now insist that Members follow regular order in yielding and reclaiming time Members will not speak at the same time.

The gentleman from California (Mr. *Lewis*) controls the time and is recognized for the remainder of his time.

Mr. **LEWIS** of California. How much time do I have remaining, Mr. Chairman?

The **CHAIRMAN**. The gentleman has 15 seconds.

Mr. **LEWIS** of California. Let me say that we made a major effort to see that veterans in our hospital did not have to walk around with folders under their arm. We insisted on computerization within that hospital. The gentleman could help me a lot helping the VSOs to really work with veterans where they are being treated or not treated so well.

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. **LEWIS** of California. Mr. Chairman, I make a point of order against the amendment because it proposes to change existing law and constitutes legislation on an appropriations bill which violates clause 2 rule XXI.

The rule states that an amendment to a general appropriation bill shall not be in order if it changes existing law or imposes additional duties.

I ask for the Chair's ruling.

Mr. **FILNER**. Mr. Chairman, I wish to be heard on the point of order.

The **CHAIRMAN**. The gentleman is recognized.

Mr. **FILNER**. Once again we are using the rules

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to block a commonsense amendment. It seems to me that the chairman has deeper issues than a blocking of the thing on a procedural ground and feels that the VA is not doing its job. That is obviously a deep issue that we ought to discuss, but that should not lead him to block this amendment.

In addition, the only way I could judge the sincerity of the majority party in these issues is to see what they had done to the chairman of the committee I have sat on for the last 12 years; that is, the VA Committee. The chairman was removed from that job, purged from that job because he stood up for veterans.

I hope, Mr. Chairman, that the gentleman will join me on a mission as I join him on a mission for accountability and efficiency to convince the

leadership of his party to put back on that committee members of the committee who actually fight for veterans.

Once again, I think the veterans of this Nation ought to understand that the rules of this House can be waived for anything that the majority party wants, but when it comes to the veterans of this Nation, they refuse to waive the rules.

The CHAIRMAN. The Chair is prepared to rule on the point of order.

The Chair finds that the amendment, although in the form of a limitation, proposes a legislative contingency imposing new duties on the Executive.

As such, the amendment violates clause 2 of rule XXI. The point of order is sustained.