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House of Representatives

FILNER CONTINUES TO FIGHT FOR OUR NATION'S VETERANS!

HON. BOB FILNER

OF CALIFORNIA
IN THE HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, and colleagues, since the creation of the Department of Veterans Affairs health care system, the Nation's doctors of chiropractic have been kept outside and all but prevented from providing proven, cost-effective and much-needed care to veterans, including those among the most vulnerable and in need of the range of the health care services that doctors of chiropractic are licensed to provide. In 2002, 4.5 million patients received care in VA health facilities, including 75 percent of all disabled and low-income veterans. Although the VA health care budget was roughly \$26 billion in 2002, less than \$370,000 went toward chiropractic services for veterans. This, in a country with more than 25 million chiropractic patients and more than 60,000 Doctors of Chiropractic.

I am proud to introduce legislation—H.R. 917, The Better Access to Chiropractors to Keep Our Veterans Healthy Act (BACK Our Veterans Health Act)—that is designed to provide veterans with direct access to a Doctor of Chiropractic, if

that is their choice, through the veterans health care system. In developing this bill, I have worked closely with chiropractic patients, particularly our veterans, who know the benefits of chiropractic care and bear witness to the positive outcomes and preventative health benefits of chiropractic care.

Specifically, my bill seeks to amend Title 38 of the United States Code to permit eligible veterans to have direct access to chiropractic care at VA hospitals and clinics. Section 3 of the measure states that "The Secretary [of Veterans Affairs] shall permit eligible veterans to receive needed [health care] services, rehabilitative services, and preventative health services from a licensed doctor of chiropractic on a direct access basis at the election of the eligible veteran, if such services are within the State scope of practice of such doctor of chiropractic." The measure goes on to directly prohibit discrimination among licensed health care

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providers by the VA when determining which services a patient needs.

Over the years, Mr. Speaker, representatives of the Department of Veterans Affairs have come before the House Veterans Affairs Committee, a panel on which I serve, and have insisted that chiropractic benefits are available to veterans and that no bias exists within the VA against the chiropractic profession. But the facts I cited above speak otherwise. For all practical purposes, access to chiropractic care has been non-existent within the VA system. Chiropractic care has so seldom been offered to veterans that it can be fairly said to be a phantom benefit—and for years, Mr. Speaker, the VA has done nothing to correct this deficiency. There is simply no evidence that the VA has ever acted proactively in any meaningful and substantive way to ensure that chiropractic care is made available to veterans—and because of that track record of neglect, the U.S. Congress felt compelled to take action.

As a result, Congress in recent years has enacted three separate statutes seeking to ensure veterans access to chiropractic care (Public Law 106-117, Public Law 107-135 and Public Law 108-170). The last of those statutes gives explicit authority to the VA to hire doctors of chiropractic as full time employees. I'm proud to have worked with colleagues on both sides of the aisle to help advance those initiatives—and I am

hopeful that a reluctant VA has finally seen the light.

I understand that, last year, former VA Secretary Principi released new policy directives regarding chiropractic care and that we may be on our way to seeing the true and full integration of chiropractic care into the VA. But Mr. Speaker, if the past is any guide to the future, then I must remain concerned until I see these new policies firmly in place and working well in all VA treatment facilities. To help ensure that, in the future, barriers to veterans who want and need chiropractic care are fully removed, I am pleased to introduce legislation that would require the VA to make chiropractic care available on a direct access basis to our veterans.

Perhaps my legislation will prove not to be necessary—because referrals to doctors of chiropractic will actually take place with the encouragement and support of the leadership of the VA. But as insurance, the enactment of the legislation I propose would guarantee the right of a veteran to obtain this important service without the cost and stumbling blocks of going through potentially hostile gatekeepers.

Accordingly, I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting unimpeded access to chiropractic care throughout the veterans health care system and help enact this measure, H.R. 917.