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House of Representatives

HONORING FIREFIGHTERS AND OTHER PUBLIC SERVANTS WHO RESPONDED TO THE CALIFORNIA WILDFIRES

HON. BOB FILNER
OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MR. FILNER: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support H. Res. 425, a resolution honoring and commemorating the heroic efforts of the firefighters who fought to save lives and property. These firefighters exhibited resilience and courage, continuing to stay on the lines, often in back-to-back shifts and, in some instances, knowing that their own families were in danger or that their personal homes had been lost.

The fires that swept across Southern California tested our resolve. All of us in the fire's path were forced to wrestle with the magnitude of the destructive force bearing down on our neighborhoods. Clearly, we owe a

huge debt of gratitude to the brave firefighters who met this huge obstacle head on, and I think all of us were impressed by the outpouring of compassion in our communities as neighbors helped neighbors, and strangers came to the aid of those they had never met.

I have made a commitment to my constituents to fight for our neighbors as we begin the difficult process of rebuilding. I will be a vocal advocate in Washington for the necessary federal assistance being made available so our neighbors can begin to put their lives back together. Just yesterday, I took part in meetings with the President of the United States when he visited San

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Diego to tour the fire damage, telling him that our people need all the resources of the federal government marshaled for their support over the upcoming weeks and months. There will be questions that need to be answered about what preparations were made to combat a fire of this magnitude in our region, and I will not pull punches in getting to the bottom of any culpability that could have hampered our ability to stop this fire.

In addition to co-sponsoring this important legislation, I have co-sponsored two other important fire related bills. H.R. 3407, the California FIRE Act, to provide \$500 million in immediate disaster relief to the victims of the California fires, and H.R. 3431, the Firefighters Medical Monitoring Act, to keep track of the health of the California firefighters after the fires are extinguished. We must ensure that the firefighters who put their lives at risk do not become ill following the fires. I recently voted in favor of the Supplemental Appropriations bill

because of the terrible suffering and devastation endured by the citizens of San Diego County as a result of the firestorm, \$500 million was added for Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) disaster assistance in California. Last week, I contacted FEMA Director Michael Brown and President Bush, urging them to make a FEMA center operational immediately in San Diego, to help my constituents in processing the necessary paperwork to begin the process of rebuilding their lives. This important funding will allow FEMA to open one-stop clearinghouses for information and assistance in expediting the huge volume of disaster claims that will result from this tragedy.

I know, in a very personal way, the suffering of San Diegans in the recent firestorm and because I want to say "thank you" to the thousands of professional firefighters who exhibited so much bravery and courage in recent days, I support this important bill.