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House of Representatives

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS MEDICAL FACILITY AUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2006

HON. BOB FILNER

OF CALIFORNIA
IN THE HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding and thank the committee and the Chair for moving this bill forward.

I rise also in support of H.R. 5815. It has been some time now since Congress acted to address the health care infrastructure of the Department of Veterans Affairs. I am pleased, along with everyone else, that the Committee on Veterans' Affairs has reasserted its traditional role in this area.

We have supported the CARES process, the Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services, but have always maintained that the most important part of that acronym is at the end, that is, "enhanced services." Realignment is certainly essential, but enhanced services are critical.

As the CARES report to the Secretary stated in 2004: "VA infrastructure and support facilities, many built in the aftermath of World War II, are not all configured for contemporary health care

delivery, and some are no longer appropriately located. Moreover, with an average age exceeding 50 years, these buildings are becoming more costly to maintain."

We all know that VA health care is a national asset. Our committee has been trying to ensure that veterans receive the health care they have earned and deserve. While health care funding should remain our biggest priority, we must also see to it that the facilities where veterans receive this health care are modern and up to date, as well as conveniently located to their place of residence. It is difficult to provide the most modern health care in facilities that are half a century old. It is time that we recognize this and move forward in bringing the aging VA infrastructure up to the standards of the 21st century.

This bill is an important step in the process. It provides the authorization for the VA to complete the projects it has started. It provides the authorization for us to rebuild VA facilities that

were destroyed by Hurricane Katrina, and it provides authority to further the VA's collaborative efforts, efforts that hold the promise of enhancing health care for our veterans while maintaining the unique identity of the VA health care system.

We must ensure that VA construction projects are authorized, that the resources are provided to quickly complete them, and that we provide all the resources needed to maintain high quality health care in the Veterans Administration. We must keep our promises to the men and women who have served our Nation in the past and, of course, are serving us today.

So I thank my colleagues on the Veterans' Affairs Committee for their work on this issue and urge speedy passage of this important legislation.