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House of Representatives

CHIROPRACTIC CARE FOR ALL VETERANS!

HON. BOB FILNER

OF CALIFORNIA
IN THE HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, since the creation of the Department of Veterans Affairs' health care system, the Nation's doctors of chiropractic have been, until recently, kept outside and all but prevented from providing proven, cost-effective and much-needed care to veterans—including many in need of the health care services that doctors of chiropractic are licensed to provide.

A little history: Over the years, representatives of the Department of Veterans Affairs have come before the House of Representatives Veterans' Affairs Committee and have insisted that chiropractic benefits are available to veterans and that no bias exists within the VA against the chiropractic profession. Access is becoming greater, and hopefully the bills I am introducing will not be necessary, but for all practical purposes, access to chiropractic care, until very recently, had been non-existent within the VA system. Chiropractic care was so seldom offered to veterans that it could have been fairly said to be a phantom benefit.

Because of the track record of neglect, in recent years Congress enacted 3 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 gave 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.

In addition, former VA Secretary Anthony Principi released policy directives before his departure regarding the true and full integration of chiropractic care within the VA, and it is beginning to happen, offered in more than 25 medical centers. But we must remain concerned until we see these policies firmly in place and working well in all VA treatment facilities.

As insurance, the enactment of the legislation I propose will guarantee the right of a veteran to obtain this important service at the local VA without the cost and stumbling blocks of going through potentially hostile gatekeepers.

I am proud to re-introduce a bill that former Congressman Jeb Bradley had introduced in the last session of Congress: H.R. 1470, the "Chiropractic Care Available to All Veterans Act," and to

reintroduce my bill from the last session: H.R. 1471, the “Better Access to Chiropractors to Keep Our Veterans Healthy Act (BACK Our Veterans Health Act).”

The first, H.R. 1470, requires that the provision of chiropractic services and care be phased in so that it will be provided at not fewer than 75 medical centers by December 31, 2009 and at all medical centers by December 31, 2011. Within five years, all veterans will have access to chiropractic care if and when they need it.

The second, H.R. 1471, is designed to provide veterans with direct access to chiropractic care at VA hospitals and clinics. The measure directly prohibits discrimination among licensed health care providers by the VA when determining which services a patient needs.

In developing these bills, 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. I also was pleased to work with the American Chiropractic Association (ACA), the nation’s largest chiropractic organization and the national voice of doctors of chiropractic and their patients. I have been told by the ACA that there are more than 60,000 doctors of chiropractic and in excess of 25 million chiropractic patients across America. Some of these doctors certainly should be directly available to our veterans. Finally, I am a chiropractic patient myself and have been greatly helped by chiropractic care for physical problems caused by an automobile accident. I hate to think that veterans do not have this same opportunity for relief from pain.

A large number of all medical problems in the returning soldiers from Iraq and Afghanistan—42 percent—are musculoskeletal injuries, which are injuries that are often directed to chiropractors. So the timing could not be better for passage of these bills.

Accordingly, I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting unimpeded access to chiropractic care throughout the veterans’ health care system and help enact these measures.