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## *House of Representatives*

# Sheer Hypocrisy: Supporting Our Troops but not the Vets

**HON. BOB FILNER  
OF CALIFORNIA**

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**MR. FILNER:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding to me, and I speak this evening from the Republican side of the aisle in the hope that my words, and the words of all my colleagues here tonight, will nestle in the empty seats that are here this evening and, by osmosis, maybe change the hearts and the minds of those who, as the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. Strickland) just said, just last week in one minute voted to support the troops in Iraq, and in the very next vote voted to cut veterans benefits by the \$28 billion he mentioned. What sheer hypocrisy, my colleague said; and I think the American people must understand this.

We say they have cut this \$28 billion over 10 years. That means \$2 billion or \$3 billion every year from the budget from what it should have been. Now, \$2 billion or \$3 billion around here sounds like a little bit of money, but \$2 billion or \$3 billion out in the countryside sounds like some unimaginable figure. And it really is.

What could we do with that \$2 billion or \$3 billion every year for our veterans? What should we do with that which is going to be cut by the Republican budget? Here is what we could do with that. Right now there are a quarter million veterans waiting for their first appointment, their first appointment with the VA. They have been waiting for over 6 months. Some of these veterans will die before they have their first appointment the way our system works right now.

There are almost a half million veterans who have made claims for disability to the Veterans Administration that are pending. They may be pending for 2, 3, 4, some even 5 years; 125,000

appeals are pending for years. Why is that the case? Because the VA does not have enough resources to solve those cases within the 30, 60, or 90 days, the way they should be solved. Why is a veteran kept waiting for years? There are veterans in my district who have died while waiting for their appeals to be adjudicated, as we said. That is what the \$2 billion will buy. It will get the veterans the service they need, get them the disability justice that they deserve. That is what the \$2 billion will buy.

It will buy full funding of the Montgomery GI bill. For many young people that bill is the only entrance into the economy of today, to get an education. We have the Montgomery GI bill to do it, except we do not fund it. We fund it at a few hundred bucks a month. We need to have the full funding of that so our veterans can get funding.

I could go on with what this \$2 billion will buy, and we will be doing that for the next few weeks. We will have colloquies on this. But I will just end by saying that our veterans are being mistreated by this Nation. The folks in Iraq will come home as veterans. What do my colleagues think their morale will be when they know they have to wait years before they can ever get their claim adjudicated? It is time for veterans around the Nation to watch what we do, not what we say. I believe they should be here when the appropriations process occurs. I have suggested they should surround the Capitol while we do that bill until we do the right thing. They should set up tents, bivouacs. Be here so their representatives do the right thing. Let us support our veterans the way we should.

