[Supporting the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States in Opposition to Disability Benefit Cuts in the Take Care of America's Veterans Act]

Resolution supporting the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) in opposing disability compensation offset provisions contained in (House of Representatives) H.R. 9237 and (Senate) S. 4744, the proposed Take Care of America's Veterans Act; urging Congress to remove provisions that would reduce or eliminate disability compensation for veterans with service-connected tinnitus and sleep apnea; protecting the Veterans Affairs (VA) workforce and veterans' access to direct VA care; and advancing veterans' benefits without funding them by cutting earned benefits for other veterans.

WHEREAS, The City and County of San Francisco honors the service and sacrifice of veterans, servicemembers, military families, survivors, and the federal employees who serve them; and

WHEREAS, Veterans' disability compensation is an earned benefit owed to veterans for injuries, illnesses, and conditions incurred or aggravated through military service; and

WHEREAS, The VFW has opposed the Take Care of America's Veterans Act as currently drafted because it would use reductions in veterans' disability compensation and health care access as a funding mechanism for other veterans' benefits; and

WHEREAS, The VFW has stated that veterans' benefits should not be financed through offsets, fee increases, or benefit reductions that place additional burdens on veterans, military families, and survivors; and

WHEREAS, The proposed legislation would direct the Department of Veterans Affairs to revise how service-connected tinnitus and sleep apnea are rated for disability compensation purposes; and

WHEREAS, Tinnitus and sleep apnea are common service-connected conditions that can significantly affect veterans' physical health, mental well-being, daily life, employment, and long-term financial security; and

WHEREAS, The proposed changes would effectively stop separate compensation for many veterans with service-connected tinnitus and dramatically reduce compensation for many disabled veterans with sleep apnea who use a breathing assistance device, such as a CPAP machine, while sleeping; and

WHEREAS, Although the legislation contains language protecting compensation already in effect before enactment from being reduced solely on the basis of the revised rating schedule, Disabled American Veterans has warned that the proposed changes would apply to all new claims as well as reassessments or reevaluations of existing claims; and

WHEREAS, Claims that the proposal does not cut veterans' benefits merely because some existing ratings are grandfathered are incomplete and misleading, because reducing compensation available for future claims, newly filed claims, reassessed claims, reevaluated claims, or future veterans' claims is still a cut to veterans' earned benefits; and

WHEREAS, According to VA estimates reported by the VFW, the proposed changes could reduce disability compensation payments by approximately $57 billion over 10 years and affect up to 1.5 million veterans; and

WHEREAS, Reducing or eliminating compensation for service-connected tinnitus and sleep apnea is not based on evidence that these service-connected disabilities have become less serious or less deserving of compensation, but is instead a budget-driven decision that would shift costs and burdens onto disabled veterans and their families; and

WHEREAS, The VFW rejects these provisions because they would unfairly penalize disabled veterans and set a dangerous precedent by allowing Congress to alter disability

ratings for budgetary purposes rather than relying on medical evidence and the established principles of the VA rating schedule; and

WHEREAS, Veterans' priorities should be considered on their own merits, and broad veterans' legislation should not force veterans, military families, and survivors to choose between long-sought benefit improvements and cuts to disability compensation for other disabled veterans; and

WHEREAS, The City and County of San Francisco supports improving veterans' services and expanding benefits where needed, and further believes such improvements should not be funded by reducing disability compensation or weakening health care protections for other veterans; and

WHEREAS, Weakening workplace rights and protections for VA health care professionals would undermine the VA's ability to recruit and retain the mental health professionals and other caregivers needed to serve veterans; and

WHEREAS, Protecting veterans' care requires protecting both veterans' earned benefits and the public VA workforce that provides direct, specialized, and accountable care to veterans; and

WHEREAS, While community care programs can serve an important role when properly integrated with the VA system, expanding reliance on non-VA care without adequate safeguards would increase costs to taxpayers and weaken the quality, continuity, accountability, and long-term capacity of the VA health care system; and

WHEREAS, A grateful nation should honor its obligations to veterans and should not balance its budget by reducing benefits owed to the men and women who served; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco supports the VFW's position opposing the disability compensation offset provisions contained

in (House of Representatives) H.R. 9237 and (Senate) S. 4744, the proposed Take Care of America's Veterans Act, as currently drafted; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the City and County of San Francisco urges Congress to remove provisions that would reduce or eliminate disability compensation for veterans with service-connected tinnitus and sleep apnea; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the City and County of San Francisco urges Congress to remove or substantially revise provisions that would weaken workplace rights and protections for VA health care professionals or otherwise impair the VA's ability to recruit and retain health care workers who serve veterans; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the City and County of San Francisco urges Congress to protect veterans' access to direct VA care and to reject any expansion of outside care that undermines the quality, continuity, accountability, or long-term capacity of the VA health care system; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the City and County of San Francisco urges Congress to advance veterans' benefits legislation without using reductions in earned veterans' disability compensation as a budget offset, and rejects misleading claims that the proposal does not cut benefits merely because some existing ratings are grandfathered; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors shall transmit copies of this Resolution to California's United States Senators, the members of the United States House of Representatives representing the City and County of San Francisco, the Chair and Ranking Member of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, the Chair and Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, the authors and principal sponsors of H.R. 9237 and S. 4744, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.