

Conservative Coalition: Support Veterans Health Care Choice and Protect Taxpayers

October 23, 2017

Dear Senators and Representatives:

On behalf of our organizations and the millions of Americans we represent, we write to express our strong support for reforming the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical system.

In 2014, the nation was shocked by reports of hundreds of veterans dying while waiting for care at VA hospitals across the country coupled with repeated instances of negligence and misconduct on the part of VA employees. In response, Congress and President Obama passed into law the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 which, among other things, created the Veterans Choice Program (VCP). This temporary program was designed to give veterans who were forty miles away from a VA facility or who had been on a wait list for more than thirty days the ability to choose to access a medical provider in the private sector.

Unfortunately, the VCP was poorly implemented and undermined by bureaucrats who opposed the concept of introducing more choice into the VA system. With the VCP recently experiencing a budget shortfall that had to be backfilled and with money likely to run out again by early next year, Congress must act to ensure that veterans who depend on the VA for their health care can seek care in the private sector – especially considering so many of them are currently trapped in poor-quality VA facilities.

To ensure that future choice and community care programs are improving the delivery of health care to our veterans, the following elements should be included in future VA reform legislation:

- **Increased health care choice for veterans at the VA.** Americans who put their lives on the line for our country should have the freedom to choose to use their VA benefits in the private health care market. Giving veterans more health care choice is something that has overwhelming support among veterans and non-veterans alike. Recent polling commissioned by Concerned Veterans for America shows that over 90 percent of veterans and non-veterans support giving veterans who use the VA more health care choices. Polling conducted by Gallup in 2016 also showed similar results.
- **Protection for the nation's taxpayers.** Over the last ten years, the Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) budget has more than





doubled from \$31.5 billion to \$67.5 billion- far out pacing the growth in the VA's patient population. Despite these additional resources, the VA continues to struggle to provide timely and quality care to many veterans. Possible cost controls include: shutting down or consolidating empty or under-utilized VA facilities, designating the VA as a secondary payor for veterans with other health insurance for non-service connected private sector care, and ensuring cost-shares that currently exist within the VHA are applied to care outside of the VA.

- **Increased transparency around costs and quality of VA care.** VA Secretary Shulkin has made significant progress over the past 6 months in increasing transparency by releasing more information on wait times and quality of care within the VHA. Congress should seek additional legislative solutions such as releasing more information about the quality of its care, wait times, and health care costs and require that the data being provided to the public is accurate. This will further empower veterans to make better health care choices with their VA benefits and increase accountability for the VA.

We're encouraged to hear consistent support for expanding health care choice for veterans from President Trump, VA Secretary Shulkin, and leaders in Congress. We look forward to working with you in the coming months to advance legislation that empowers veterans with increased choice over their health care at the VA. Our heroes deserve nothing less.

Sincerely,

Mark Lucas, Executive Director
Concerned Veterans for America

Chrissy Harbin, Vice President of External Affairs
Americans for Prosperity

Phil Kerpen, President
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Grover Norquist, President
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