

**NINETY-EIGHTH NATIONAL CONVENTION
OF
THE AMERICAN LEGION
Cincinnati, Ohio
August 30, 31, September 1, 2016**

**Resolution No. 372: Oppose Closing or Privatization of Department of Veterans Affairs
Health Care System**

Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The American Legion began its support for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in 1930, even before there was a VA, by lobbying Congress to consolidate and coordinate government activities affecting war veterans by creating the Veterans Administration as a federal entity; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion fought hard for the elevation of the Veterans Administration to cabinet-level status in 1989, arguing that veterans deserve representation at the highest levels of the government; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion has kept close watch on the quality of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health-care system through the System Worth Saving program; and

WHEREAS, The System Worth Saving program has evolved into a full-service benefits delivery and watchdog program that has helped educate the federal government and veterans as to the strengths and weaknesses of VA's health-care system and the services it is responsible for delivering to veterans; and

WHEREAS, The program has garnered presidential praise while influencing congressional action and administrative regulation; and

WHEREAS, Recent discussion by groups such as the congressionally created Commission on Care have considered closing VA medical centers and transitioning veterans into the private sector for health care; and

WHEREAS, The Commission on Care's proposed strawman document recommends that "the most obsolete and underutilized facilities should be closed and those patients transferred to local providers"; and

WHEREAS, Transforming the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) to more private care would not only be disadvantageous to our nation's veterans, but it would not be cost effective according to a Congressional Budget Office report titled "comparing the cost of the veterans' health-care system with private sector costs"; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion does not believe VA should close any of its existing medical centers simply as a method of generating savings; and

WHEREAS, VA is prohibited from billing and collecting Medicare reimbursements for the treatment of non-service connected medical conditions of enrolled Medicare-eligible veterans; and

WHEREAS, Programs such as Fee-Basis, Project Access Received Closer to Home (ARCH), Patient-Centered Community Care (PC3), and the Veterans Choice Program (VCP) were enacted by Congress to ensure eligible veterans could be referred outside the VA for needed, and timely, health-care services; and

WHEREAS, It has become apparent that layering yet another program on top of the numerous existing non-VA care programs, each with their own unique set of requirements, resulted in a complex and confusing landscape for veterans and community providers, as well as the VA employees that serve and support them; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion opposes any legislation or effort to close or privatize the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health-care system; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That Congress enact legislation that provides the VA the authority to consolidate its multiple non-VA community care programs; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That Congress enact legislation that would allow veterans to use their Medicare health care coverage, or private health care coverage, when receiving medical care or services in a VHA health-care facility, and Medicare be authorized to reimburse VA for such medical care and services; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion remain open to further discussion on the possibility of expanding and improving VA's health-care services.