From: Raughter, John B.
To: All Legion Leadership
Subject: Release: American Legion supports Veterans Choice Act
Date: Tuesday, June 03, 2014 4:44:02 PM

Legion supports Veterans Choice Act

The senate bill would allow VA enrollees to use private health care under certain conditions

WASHINGTON -- Legislation introduced in the Senate on June 3 would give veterans more choice and flexibility in their health-care treatment under certain conditions, such as the inability of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical centers to schedule appointments in a timely manner.

Veterans would be free to seek health care in the private sector if VA cannot schedule a timely appointment for them, or if they live more than 40 miles from the nearest VA medical center or community-based outpatient clinic.

Under provisions of the American Legion-backed bill (authorized for only two years) VA enrollees would receive a "Choice Card" to use for medical care from a non-VA provider.

In his letter of support, American Legion National Commander Daniel M. Dellinger wrote that the bill "provides resources now to assist veterans being denied health care by lengthy wait-times."

Noting that any legislation addressing access to VA health care should protect the department as the primary means of care for veterans, Dellinger stated, "The health care veterans will receive through non-VA facilities will still be managed through VA's office of non-VA care….

"While this legislation expands on VA's existing authority to allow veterans to receive care outside the system when VA cannot meet the demand for care, it strengthens the system by providing clear direction on how that outside care will be managed with the end goal of bringing those veterans back into the system."

The measure would also improve transparency by directing VA to post on its medical center websites the current wait-times for appointments, and establish disciplinary procedures for any employee who knowingly falsifies data pertaining to wait-times and quality measures.

Provisions of the VA Management Accountability Act (H.R. 4031), which passed the House, are also included in the bill, which would give the VA Secretary the authority to demote or fire senior executives based on performance.

An October 2012 resolution (http://archive.legion.org/bitstream/handle/123456789/2306/2012F046.pdf?sequence=1) passed by The American Legion called on VA to "develop a well-defined and consistent non-VA care coordination program, policy and procedure that includes a patient-centered care strategy" that takes veterans' "travel and distance (from VA facilities) into account."

-30-

Media contacts: Washington - Marty Callaghan:202-263-5758/202-341-8900, mcallaghan@legion.org or Indianapolis – Joe March, 317-630-1254/317- 748-1926, jmarch@legion.org. , John Raughter, 317-630-1350 / 317 441-8847. A high resolution photo of Nat. Cmdr.Dellinger is available at www.legion.org.

John Raughter

Media & Communications, National Headquarters

Phone 317.630.1253 **:: Fax** 317.630.1368