

# National Healthcare Bill Betrays Veterans

## VFW urges 'no' vote on H.R. 4872

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**WASHINGTON** — The national commander of the nation's oldest and largest combat veterans' organization is furious that Congress is moving ahead with a flawed healthcare bill that does not protect the health programs provided to veterans, servicemembers or their families.

"The president and the Democratic leadership are betraying America's veterans," said Thomas J. Tradewell Sr., a combat-wounded Vietnam veteran from Sussex, Wis., who leads the 2.1 million-member Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. and its Auxiliaries.

"And what makes matters worse is the leadership and the president knows the bill is flawed, yet they are pushing for passage today like it's a do-or-die situation. This nation deserves the best from their elected officials, and the rush to pass legislation of this magnitude is not it."

At issue is H.R. 4872 does not fully protect the healthcare programs provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs and the military's Tricare system. Specifically, the bill covers Tricare For Life but not the other Tricare programs that serve millions of beneficiaries; it does not cover children suffering from spina bifida as a result of a parent's exposure to Agent Orange; and it does not cover dependents, widows and orphans who are served by CHAMPVA, the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

"The president was very clear at our VFW national convention last year when he said he was going to protect these programs, as did the Democratic leadership in the House and Senate repeatedly throughout the year. Now we have this flawed package that everyone is trying to rush through that blatantly omits any protections of the healthcare programs our nation provides to millions of veterans, military personnel, military retirees, and their families or survivors.

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“This is Washington doubletalk at its very worse, and the uproar is going to be huge in America’s military and veterans’ communities,” said Tradewell, who wants Congress to vote against H.R. 4872 today.

The issue surfaced publicly Friday when House Armed Service Committee Chairman Ike Skelton (D-Mo.) introduced legislation to explicitly protect Tricare and other Defense Department nonappropriated fund health plans from any health reforms currently under consideration by Congress.

Yesterday, Reps. Steve Buyer (R-Ind.) and Buck McKeon (R-Calif.) tried to introduce an amendment to H.R. 4872 to protect the integrity and independence of the VA and Defense Department healthcare systems. Buyer is the ranking member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee and McKeon is the ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee.

“The VFW salutes the congressmen and their supporters,” said Tradewell, “and I hope their messages were heard loudly and clearly throughout Congress. Healthcare is important, but so is protecting the programs that were promised to our nation’s veterans, military and their families,” he said.

“Those serving in Iraq and Afghanistan should not have to worry about their dependents’ healthcare programs, but they are today, and so are millions of military retirees, veterans, survivors and children.

“Military service is based on the fundamental principle of trust, and once lost, it is virtually impossible to regain,” said Tradewell. “That is why I am urging the House to vote ‘no’ today, then go back and fix the bill with the language proposed by Skelton, Buyer and McKeon, and then come back and vote your conscience. Let’s not rush to pass flawed legislation that could tremendously impact our nation’s true heroes.”