



Senate Passes TRICARE Protections

House action still needed to recognize VA healthcare

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WASHINGTON — With the Senate passage of HR 4887 last night, all military TRICARE programs will soon be recognized as meeting minimum essential coverage standards under the new national healthcare law, according to the national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S.

Though a great victory for more than 9 million military families and retirees, Thomas J. Tradewell Sr. cautioned against celebrating until the House acts on S. 3162, which was introduced by Senate Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Daniel Akaka (D-Hawaii) to recognize and protect all VA healthcare programs, too.

"There are a few more parts to this mission, which won't be complete until the House passes S. 3162 and the president signs both bills," he said.

The VFW has been aggressively working since mid-March to ensure the new national healthcare law recognizes and protects all the healthcare programs provided by the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs.

"National healthcare will help many veterans who are ineligible for DOD or VA care," said Tradewell, a combat-wounded Vietnam veteran from Sussex, Wis., "but missing from the original legislation was language that specifically recognized all military TRICARE and VA programs as meeting minimum essential coverage standards. That meant standalone legislation was required to protect all the healthcare programs provided by the nation's two largest federal departments."

House Armed Services Committee Chairman Ike Skelton (D-Mo.) was the first to act with the introduction of H.R. 4887. His bill was necessary because the national healthcare legislation, as written, only recognized TRICARE for Life, and excluded a half dozen other TRICARE programs, as well as the health plan provided to DOD nonappropriated fund employees. H.R. 4887 passed unanimously 403-0. Senate Armed Service Personnel Subcommittee Chairman Jim Webb (D-Va.) quickly introduced S. 3148 as a companion to

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Skelton's H.R. 4887, which cleared the Senate last night.

Senate VA Committee Chairman Daniel Akaka (D-Hawaii) introduced S. 3162 to recognize and protect all VA programs. His bill remains necessary because the national healthcare legislation, as written, only recognizes veterans covered under chapter 17 of Title 38, and excludes other Title 38 recipients, to include widows and dependent children. S. 3162 passed the Senate March 26, but has yet to move to a vote in the House.

"Bill language is extremely important because it becomes the law of the land," said Tradewell, who applauded the efforts of Skelton, Webb and Akaka, as well as Senate VA Committee ranking member Richard Burr (R-N.C.), House VA Committee ranking member Steve Buyer (R-Ind.), and House Armed Services Committee ranking member Buck McKeon (R-Calif.).

"The VFW salutes these true champions in Congress for ensuring all the hard earned DOD and VA healthcare programs for America's veterans, servicemembers and their families are protected in writing."

Click [here](#) to read a press release from Senator Webb, or [here](#) to watch his video message.