

VFW Opposes New VA Privatization Attempt

Congressman's proposal breaks nation's promise to veterans

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WASHINGTON — The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is absolutely opposed to the latest congressional attempt to fix the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The “fix,” as introduced last week by Rep. Doug Lamborn (R-Colo.), “throws out the idea of acceptable patient wait times and eliminates the requirement of the veteran to ask for VA permission to use civilian medical providers,” he said in a press release. His Veterans Empowerment Act, which is cosponsored by Reps. Mark Meadows (R-N.C.) and Trent Franks (R-Ariz.), would also erode the VA’s health care system and charge veterans for care related to their service-connected wounds, illnesses and injuries.

“Giving veterans access to high quality care isn’t the issue,” said VFW National Commander Keith Harman. “Veterans enrolled in the VA already have access to the best integrated health care system in the world, as well as access to the best outside providers. The issue is whether VA’s role should be limited to being an insurance provider, which is how you dismantle the VA, not fix it,” he said. “You cannot dangle promises of better access and care while stripping funding from VA health accounts to pay outside providers at far greater costs, and with zero guarantee of better access or quality. The only thing this proposal will accomplish is kill the VA as a provider of care to America’s veterans while shifting the cost of care on to veterans.”

Aside from false promises, Lamborn’s bill would also establish a tiered premium support system that would force disabled veterans rated less than 100 percent to pay a certain percentage of their service-connected health care cost, whereas no copayments currently exist. “The VFW has long held that if our nation cannot afford to take care of veterans, then

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our nation should quit creating them,” said Harman.

The VFW has conducted [multiple surveys](#) that reflect nearly 80 percent of VFW members who are eligible for VA care choose to use their earned VA care, despite the overwhelming majority of them having other options, such as employer-sponsored health insurance, the military’s TRICARE plan, or Medicare. “Veterans appreciate options,” said Harman, “and ultimately they choose whichever health plan best fits their individual circumstances, but having unregulated choice puts the onus on veterans to find their own care — and that decision needs to be made between doctors and their patients, not by Washington.”

The VFW national commander explained that it took years for the VA's internal problems to boil over, yet politicians, new administration appointees and surrogates continue to believe they have a solution where in fact all they want to do is shift an inherent government responsibility into a civilian marketplace. Harman said the civilian marketplace also has waiting lists, can't match the VA's continuity and continuum of care, and doesn't have the VA's institutional knowledge and ability to address every malady that wounded, ill and injured veterans age 18 to 110 might have.

“Money isn’t the VA's problem insomuch as effective leadership, management and accountability are,” said Harman. “Shifting finite resources to the private sector will only signal the beginning of the end of a federal department that was created for the sole purpose of caring for America's veterans,” he said. “The private sector can augment the VA but never replace it, which is a message the VFW will continue to carry to Congress and VA Secretary Dr. David Shulkin as we work together to fix what's broken and restore the faith of veterans in their VA.”

The VFW national commander is now asking all 1.7 million members of the VFW and its Auxiliary to contact their elected officials in the House and Senate to help ensure the Veterans Empowerment Act — and any others like it — never sees the light of day. [Take action here](#).