

President Meets with VFW to Discuss Third-Party Billing Proposal

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WASHINGTON — President Obama met yesterday with the national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. to discuss the VFW's opposition to an administration proposal to bill veterans with private health insurance for the care they receive for their service-connected disabilities and wounds.

"The president told us that he would not go through with the third-party billing proposal if he felt the veterans' community didn't approve of it," said Glen M. Gardner Jr., who leads the nation's largest organization of combat veterans. "We made our opposition clearly known."

The administration proposed Feb. 26 that the Department of Veterans Affairs would receive \$55.9 billion in discretionary funding in fiscal year 2010, an amount that exceeds the current year budget by \$5.5 billion. Gardner said the proposal includes good initiatives, such as additional funding to enable more veterans to enroll into the VA system, to expand the concurrent receipt of disability compensation and retirement pay for medically-retired veterans, and to target access to care issues, especially for rural veterans. Included, however, was a proposal to increase third-party collections by billing for service-connected disability treatments.

"Charging wounded and service-connected disabled veterans for their VA healthcare breaks a sacred trust that this nation has with her veterans," said Gardner, who fears that the initiative could lead to higher insurance premiums, as well as make it more difficult for veterans and their families to obtain or retain private health insurance. He said it could also discourage civilian employers from hiring disabled veterans.

The meeting was the result of a Feb. 27 letter to the president that was signed by the leaders of 11 veterans' and military organizations, all of whom were present at the White House.

Gardner, a Vietnam veteran from Round Rock, Texas, is grateful for the president's willingness to sit down and address the issue face-to-face, but he said after yesterday's meeting that "the VFW still believes that the proposal is clearly the wrong thing to do."

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The VFW national commander voiced the VFW's opposition to the third-party collection proposal in meetings today with congressional leadership, and will again tomorrow in testimony before a joint House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committee hearing.

Click [here](#) to read the joint letter to the president.