

VFW Apologizes for Harsh Accusation

New national healthcare law still requires fixing

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WASHINGTON — The national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. issued a written apology to the president and congressional Democratic leadership today for suggesting that the lack of explicit language to protect military and veterans' healthcare programs was an act of betraying America's veterans.

"I apologized for using too harsh of a word," said Thomas J. Tradewell Sr., a combat-wounded Vietnam veteran from Sussex, Wis. "I also wanted to assure them that the VFW is well aware and most appreciative of their strong support of America's veterans, servicemembers and their families.

"But I did not apologize for our strong advocacy on the issue," he said.

"The new national healthcare bill signed into law by President Obama on Tuesday is flawed, not because of what it provides, but because of what it does not protect — all the healthcare programs provided by the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs."

Tradewell said a problem was recognized in the bill late last week by House Armed Services Committee Chairman Ike Skelton (D-Mo.), who introduced legislation to specifically protect all military Tricare programs, as well as nonappropriated fund health plans. His bill passed Saturday by a vote of 403-0, but its introduction and passage raised a serious question: What else was missing from the national healthcare bill?

Buried on page 333 of a 2,400-page document were four lines of text that only recognized Tricare for Life and veterans' healthcare programs under chapter 17, Title 38, as being accepted as minimum essential coverage under the new law. No specific language to protect other Tricare programs or other Title 38 recipients — dependents, widows or children — could be found.

"We know why the House had to pass the Senate version intact, but bill language is important because it becomes the law of the land," said Tradewell. "The VFW could not sit

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111
Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

idly by and watch legislation get passed that did not protect all the healthcare programs provided by the nation's two largest federal departments. We have constituents, too, and they look to us to watch their backs on Capitol Hill.”

The VFW is now working with members of Congress from both parties to submit amendments or legislation to fix the new national healthcare law, and applauds the corrective actions taken by Skelton as well as those of Reps. Steve Buyer (R-Ind.) and Buck McKeon (R-Calif.), and Sens. Daniel Akaka (D-Hawaii), Richard Burr (R-N.C.) and Jim Webb (D-Va.).

“All DOD and VA healthcare programs should have been written into the original bill, and the VFW will never apologize for trying to influence legislative language that does not protect those hard earned healthcare programs,” said Tradewell.

“We have never been against national healthcare, but we do take issue with any legislation that does not honor the promises made to America’s veterans, servicemembers and their families. We look forward to working with the White House and Congress to fix this problem immediately.”