

President Signs TRICARE Protections into Law

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WASHINGTON — The national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. is thanking President Obama for signing H.R. 4887 into law yesterday to recognize all Department of Defense TRICARE and nonappropriated fund healthcare programs as meeting minimum essential coverage standards under the new national healthcare law.

"On behalf of more than 9 million beneficiaries, I want to thank the president for his signature, the House and Senate for their unanimous support, and House Armed Service Committee Chairman Ike Skelton (D-Mo.) and Senate Armed Services Personnel Subcommittee Chairman Jim Webb (D-Va.) for championing these necessary protections," said VFW National Commander Thomas J. Tradewell Sr., of Sussex, Wis.

Skelton discovered that only TRICARE for Life was recognized as meeting minimum requirements for individual health insurance coverage standards, with no mention of the half-dozen other TRICARE programs or the NAF healthcare plan. His introduction of H.R. 4887 and Webb's introduction of a Senate companion bill led the VFW and others in Congress to wonder what other programs were not explicitly mentioned in the national healthcare bill? The answer: The healthcare programs provided to all Title 38 beneficiaries by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

In response, Senate VA Committee Chairman Daniel Akaka (D-Hawaii) introduced S. 3162 on March 24 to ensure all VA-provided care was recognized as meeting minimum essential coverage standards. The Senate quickly passed Akaka's bill that week. Now the VFW is working vigorously with House leadership to get S. 3162 passed into law, or its House companion bill, H.R. 5014, that House VA Committee Chairman Bob Filner (D-Calif.) introduced April 14.

"National healthcare will help many veterans who do not qualify for DOD or VA care, but missing from the original legislation was language that would clearly recognize and protect the hard earned healthcare programs of those who do," said Tradewell, who also applauds the efforts of 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.).

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"Getting H.R. 4887 signed into law is just half the fight," he said. "Now we need the House to pass the Akaka/Filner legislation so that all VA care provided to eligible veterans, widows and children will also be recognized and protected under the new national healthcare law."