

Veterans Leaders Applaud House-Senate Agreement

Passage of bill implements House-Senate agreement to continue funding Choice program and invest in VA health care

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Joint Statement from The American Legion, AMVETS, DAV (Disabled American Veterans), Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH), Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) and Wounded Warrior Project (WWP)

As veterans service organizations with over 5.5 million combined members, we applaud the House of Representatives today for passing legislation (S. 114) that would not only continue the Choice program uninterrupted, but also make critically-needed investments in the VA health care system. The bill approved today would implement a bipartisan, bicameral agreement that leaders of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees reached following Monday's defeat in the House of a prior version of Choice funding extension legislation.

On behalf of our members and all veterans who rely on VA for their medical care, we are grateful that the bill approved today will appropriate \$2.1 billion — without having to meet PAYGO offset requirements — to continue funding the current Choice program for another six months. Most importantly, we supported this legislation because it will authorize 28 urgently-needed medical facility leases to expand VA's internal capacity to deliver care, as well as provide VA with new tools and authorities to recruit, hire and retain high-quality medical professionals.

We thank House Chairman Phil Roe (TN) and Ranking Member Tim Walz (MN) for

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working nonstop all week and in good faith to address the objections we raised about the bill that failed on Monday. We are also grateful to Senate Chairman Johnny Isakson (GA) and Ranking Member Jon Tester (MT) for their tireless efforts to ensure that the final legislation would clearly demonstrate Congress' commitment to strengthening the VA health care system while also funding the Choice program. We know that this compromise agreement would not have been reached, nor the legislation approved, without the personal commitment of each of these leaders to supporting the men and women who served.

With the Senate expected to approve this legislation in the next week, and VA Secretary Shulkin indicating the President will sign it, we will have avoided an unnecessary crisis in the short term, and made critically-important investments in VA health care capacity for the long term.

While we will be gratified when this legislation is enacted, we must immediately turn our attention to the coming debate over how to strengthen and modernize the VA health care system, and how community care should be integrated to ensure timely and convenient access for all enrolled veterans. We look forward to working with both the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs to reform the VA health care system and ensure sufficient funding so that all veterans have timely access to high-quality, veteran-focused health care.