

# ENSURING VETERANS' ACCESS TO CARE

## HOW TO PROVIDE TIMELY CARE AND PROTECT, PRESERVE AND STRENGTHEN THE VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

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America's major veterans service organizations have [clearly articulated](#) the charge of the Conference Committee - "...to ensure that all veterans currently waiting for treatment must be provided access to timely, convenient health care as quickly as medically indicated" and at the same time "...protect, preserve and strengthen the VA health care system so that it remains capable of providing a full continuum of high-quality, timely health care to all enrolled veterans."

### *Paying for This Proposal*

The Senate, in an overwhelming and bi-partisan manner, said veterans' lack of access to timely care is an emergency and [agreed to emergency funding to address the problem](#). However, real compromise is about making concessions.

- The original House and Senate proposals were estimated to cost [\\$44 billion](#) and [\\$35 billion](#), respectively. **This proposal would cost less than \$25 billion** – a major concession when compared to both the House and Senate passed bills.
- This proposal concedes that some of the costs of this bill should be offset and would provide \$3.3 billion in savings from within the Veterans' Affairs Committees' jurisdiction.

What it does not concede is that the cost of war is expensive and the cost of war does not end when the last shots are fired and the last missiles are launched. **The cost of war continues until the last veteran receives the care and benefits that he or she has earned on the battlefield.**

War is an incredibly expensive proposition – in terms of human life, human suffering and in financial terms. If we are not prepared to take care of those men and women who went to war, then we should not send them to war in the first place. Taking care of veterans is a cost of war.

### *Immediate Access to Care*

- **Veterans Choice Card:** This proposal would establish a two-year program to provide veterans a Veterans Choice Card to address [immediate access needs](#) by obtaining health care from certain non-VA providers. Veterans unable to receive care at a VA medical facility within VA's wait-time performance goals or by veterans residing more than 40 miles from a VA facility would be eligible for this program.

### *Building VA's Capacity to Address Veterans' Needs*

- **VA Staffing:** This proposal would provide VA with funds to hire additional primary care providers, specialty care providers, and other clinical staff to increase its capacity to provide high quality health care to our Nation's veterans.
  - [VA's Access to Care Audit](#) found that a lack of provider slots, indicating a need for additional doctors, nurses and other medical providers, was the highest barrier or challenge to access to care.
- **Capital Infrastructure:** VA's physical infrastructure plays a significant role in VA's ability to provide timely and high quality care to veterans in a safe environment. This proposal would provide VA with funding to address its backlog of infrastructure needs and enter into emergency leases that would directly improve veterans' access to care.
  - The [Independent Budget](#), a comprehensive budget and policy document created by veterans and for veterans, has consistently identified the lack of adequate funding to maintain VA's critical infrastructure as a serious issue.
- **Information Technology:** This proposal would provide VA funding to meet the additional information technology demands required with expanded capacity and address current problems with VA's scheduling system.

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- **Caregivers:** This proposal would allow VA to provide needed benefits and services to more than 22,000 caregivers of our most seriously injured post -9/11 veterans, who have put their own lives on hold to care for those who are unable to fully care for themselves as a result of their service to this nation.
- **Authorization of Major Medical Facility Leases:** This proposal would authorize VA to enter into 27 major medical facility leases in 18 states and Puerto Rico. In many instances, these leases would improve access to care closer to home, and would increase the availability of specialty care services in these locations.
- **Veterans Benefits Administration:** This proposal would provide VA the funds it needs to expedite appeals and improve other benefits programs.

### *Removal of Incompetent Senior Officials*

- **Authority for Immediate Removal:** This proposal would provide the VA Secretary authority to immediately remove incompetent senior executives based on poor job performance while guarding against the politicization of VA or other inappropriate uses, such as whistle blower retaliation, of such authority.

### *Provisions to Support Veterans and their Families*

This proposal also contains provisions, which were included in the Sanders-McCain Agreement that passed the Senate by an overwhelming, bi-partisan, [vote of 93-3](#).

- **Sexual Assault:** This proposal contains important provisions that would improve the delivery of care to veterans who experienced sexual trauma while serving in the military.
- **Survivor Benefits:** This proposal would expand the Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarship to include surviving spouses of members of the Armed Forces who die in the line of duty, so that they can go further their education, rebuild their lives, and take care of their families.
- **In-State Tuition Assistance for Post-9/11 Veterans:** This proposal includes a bi-partisan provision introduced by the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, similar to a provision that passed the House unanimously, that would give our transitioning servicemembers a fair shot at attaining their educational goals without incurring an additional financial burden.