



January 16, 2018

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Ryan:

Almost three million more veterans voted in 2016 than in 2012.

Those veterans voted in such huge numbers because Veterans issues, especially VA health care reform, were central in the Presidential election debate. A key aspect of that debate was then candidate Trump's 10th point in his 10-Point Plan for VA Reform: **"We are going to ensure every Veteran in America has the choice to seek care at the VA, or to seek private medical care paid for by our government."**

Veterans were motivated by that promise in 2016, and turned out in record numbers to vote on that exact issue. And **The Independence Fund fully supports the complete execution of that promise – the Veteran should be able to choose his or her healthcare provider while under the VA's care**, whether that be a provider within the VA, or from outside the VA in the community.

Unfortunately, the bill reported to the House from the House Veterans Affairs Committee, H.R. 4242, does not deliver on the President's promise, and perpetuates Veterans dependence on VA chosen health care providers. The bill explicitly states the VA will only provide community care outside the VA if such a health care "provider at a Department [of Veterans Affairs] facility is not available". In fact, the bill specifically directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to "give priority to medical facilities and health care providers of the Department [of Veterans Affairs]". That does not empower the Veteran in their healthcare choices.

When you place the President's campaign promise alongside the text of the HVAC passed bill, it is clear the gap between the two is huge. The President's campaign promise put health care decision-making authority with the Veteran; just like they have under Medicare, Medicaid, or Tricare. The HVAC bill pushes health care decision making back to, and prioritizes the decisions with, the same nameless bureaucrats who have consistently and repeatedly failed Veterans.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, **we implore you not to proceed to consideration of H.R. 4242 unless it is substantially revised to incorporate (or move to any other VA healthcare reform legislation unless it contains), clear provisions giving the Veteran primary decision-making authority for their health care provider. We believe H.R. 4457, The Veteran Empowerment Act, comes the closest to meeting the President's campaign promise** and believe Representative Lamborn must be party to any agreed VA healthcare reform legislation considered by the House.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration, and feel free to call upon us if you have any questions. We look forward to working with you on this vitally important issue.

Very Respectfully,

Bob Carey
CAPT, USN (Ret)
Director, Policy & Advocacy

Copy to:

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy, Majority Leader

The Honorable Steve Scalise, Majority Whip

The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rogers, Republican Conference Chair

The Honorable Doug Collins, Republican Conference Vice Chair

The Honorable Jason Smith, Republican Policy Conference Secretary

The Honorable Luke Messer, Republican Policy Committee Chair

The Honorable Phil Roe, Chair, House Veterans Affairs Committee