



January 16, 2018

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
U.S. Senate Majority Leader
S-231, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell:

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 Senate from the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, S. 2193, does not deliver on the President's promise, and perpetuates the Veterans dependence on only those health care providers the VA chooses. The bill explicitly states the Veteran's VA health care provider must determine care outside the VA is in best medical interest of the covered veteran..." and then even further limits that community care access by limiting the doctor's decision to, "...criteria developed by the Secretary", even continuing the arbitrary 30 day/40 mile standard from the current VA Choice system. This does not empower the Veteran in their healthcare choices.

When you place the President's campaign promise alongside the text of the SVAC 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 SVAC bill leaves health care decision making with nameless bureaucrats who have consistently and repeatedly failed Veterans.

Therefore, Mr. Leader, **we implore you not to proceed to consideration of S. 2193 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 S. 2184, The Veterans Community Care and Access Act, comes the closest to meeting the President's campaign promise and believe Senators McCain and Moran must be parties to any agreed VA healthcare reform legislation considered by the Senate.**

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 Michael R. Pence, President of the Senate

The Honorable John Cornyn, Assistant Majority Leader

The Honorable John Thune, Republican Conference Chairman

The Honorable Roy Blunt, Vice Chairman of the Senate Republican Conference

The Honorable John Barrasso, Republican Policy Committee Chairman

The Honorable Johnny Isakson, Chair, Senate Veterans Affairs Committee