



Paralyzed Veterans of America

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Chartered by the Congress of the United States
June 27, 2017

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators McConnell and Schumer:

You and your colleagues are about to pursue significant changes to America's health care system. Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) joins the public as well as lawmakers on both sides of the aisle who have expressed concern about the opaque and closed process that has offered little to no opportunity for discussion of the impact of those changes on millions of Americans, which includes catastrophically disabled veterans. It is these veterans who feel the greatest impact of policies that affect access to care, whether that care is delivered by the Department of Veterans Affairs health system or any number of other federal, state, or private-insurance providers. PVA is the nation's only Congressionally-chartered veterans' service organization solely dedicated to representing veterans with spinal cord injury and/or disease.

By using reconciliation to advance the Senate's legislation, it appears that the children of catastrophically disabled veterans, which includes college students and adult children with special needs, will continue to be excluded from current policies that provide for dependent insurance coverage up to age 26. While the Senate bill appears to have retained much of the Affordable Care Act's premium tax credits, PVA has been informed that reconciliation procedures preclude the opportunity to ensure that any tax credits to make health insurance affordable will be available to veterans who are not enrolled in the VA health care system.

Finally, as you know, there are over 1.7 million veterans who currently rely on Medicaid.¹ Between traditional Medicaid, the Medicaid expansion as well as the ACA premium tax credits, there has been a 40% decrease in uninsured non-elderly veterans between 2013 and 2015.² Most of these veterans are older than 45, the age group most adversely affected by the Senate bill's age ratings for insurance premiums. What will

¹ FamiliesUSA Fact Sheet, May 2017, "Cutting Medicaid Would Hurt Veterans"

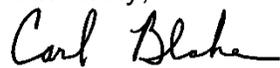
² Urban Institute, April 2017, "Veterans Saw Broad Coverage Gains Between 2013 and 2015"

become of these veterans as they face higher insurance costs and as states are faced with severely constrained Medicaid budgets under per capita caps or block grants?

Some of these veterans may be able to enroll in the VA health care system under current rules but others, because of policies that bar enrollment to certain veterans above modest income thresholds, will be denied access to the VA. Congress could act to open up the VA health care system to all veterans but it is unclear whether the VA has the budgetary and system capacities able to handle even half of the veterans now covered under Medicaid. Unfortunately, the reconciliation rules do not permit consideration of this policy and, thus, many of those who served this country honorably – many in harm's way – will continue to be denied access to the principal health care system for veterans.

PVA has continually urged that health care reform be done in a bipartisan fashion under regular order that allows for issues of significant concern to our members and other veterans to be fully aired. Congress can no longer fake listening to these men and women; evidence of it is beginning to show in the increasingly marginal health, welfare, and quality of life for far too many veterans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carl Blake". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Carl Blake

Associate Executive Director

Cc: Members, U. S. Senate