

July 30, 2009

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Madam Speaker:

We are writing to express grave concerns about H.R. 3200, America's Affordable Health Choices Act of 2009. As currently drafted, we would oppose this legislation because it could limit the health care choices for veterans, increase the cost of health care for veterans, deny coverage to dependents family members of veterans, and threaten the quality of health care offered to veterans through the VA health care system.

As you know, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) provides medical care services to its 8 million enrolled veterans at more than 1,400 medical centers, outpatient clinics and other points of service. With over 200,000 employees, the VHA runs the largest integrated health care system in the United States, and over the past decade the quality of care provided has risen to amongst the finest health care systems in the nation. Unfortunately, as currently drafted, H.R. 3200 fails to adequately recognize, protect or preserve this invaluable system for our nation's 24 million veterans.

By virtue of their service and sacrifices, veterans have earned special benefits that are separate and in addition to benefits the government provides to other citizens. Enrollment in VA health care, especially in the case of service-connected disabled veterans, should never become a bar or obstacle to the receipt of benefits that non-veteran citizens receive in this or any other bill. Any national health reform legislation must make certain that all veterans, including all of those enrolled in VA health care, remain eligible to enroll in any Exchange-participating health benefits plan offered under H.R. 3200 through the Health Insurance Exchange, or in any other public or cooperative health insurance program.

The VHA provides a uniform medical benefits package to all enrolled veterans, regardless of their enrollment priority group, that emphasizes preventive and primary care, and offers a full range of outpatient and inpatient services and prescription medications. Accordingly, enrollment in the VHA health care program must be considered acceptable coverage in the same manner as members of the uniformed services and their dependents, including Civilian Health and Medical Program of the VA (CHAMPVA) coverage furnished under section 1781 of title 38 United States Code, so that they will not be subject to any tax or penalty for lack of health care coverage.

Furthermore, with limited exception,¹ the VA health care program generally does not provide services to dependents and families. As such, health reform legislation must also make clear that

¹ CHAMPVA, CHAMPVA CITI); Spina Bifida Program; Children of Women Vietnam Veterans; TRICARE

Speaker Nancy Pelosi
July 30, 2009
Page 2

a veteran's spouse and children should also be eligible to enroll in any Exchange-participating health benefits plan offered through the Health Insurance Exchange, or in any other public or cooperative health insurance program.

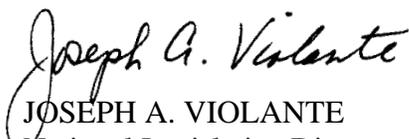
Finally, it is imperative that H.R. 3200, or any other health care reform legislation considered in Congress, must make clear that the health care system of the Department of Veterans Affairs shall be run by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to meet the health care needs of veterans, dependents and survivors, and that this authority shall not be infringed by any national health care organizations or any other departments, agencies or independent organizations of the federal government.

Madame Speaker, on behalf of the millions of veterans we represent, and for the benefit of the 24 million veterans living today and the millions more future veterans, we urge you and your colleagues to amend and clarify the current draft language in H.R. 3200 to protect the health care of our veterans. Unless the changes and clarifications discussed above are made in the legislation, we will oppose H.R. 3200 or any other legislation that threatens the health care for our nation's veterans.

Respectfully,

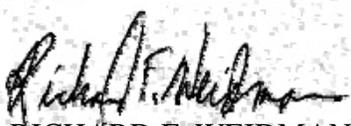

RAYMOND C. KELLEY
National Legislative Director
AMVETS (American Veterans)


THOMAS ZAMPERI
Director of Government Relations
Blinded Veterans Association


JOSEPH A. VIOLANTE
National Legislative Director
Disabled American Veterans


HERB ROSENBLEETH
National Executive Director
Jewish War Veterans of the USA


HERSHEL GOBER
National Legislative Director
Military Order of the Purple Heart
of the USA, Inc.


RICHARD F. WEIDMAN
Director of Government Relations
Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc.