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National Health Care Plan concerns unfounded

The Reserve Officers Association has been receiving a lot of calls and e-mails with concerns from retired ROA members that the proposed National Health care plan will deny them TRICARE or TRICARE For Life coverage. Anxiety has been increased by both public debate and viral e-mails that are reinforcing apprehension.

At this moment there are no real concerns about there being a health care crisis. TRICARE is defined as an “acceptable coverage” satisfying certain requirements in the new health bill (H.R.3200) to exclude TRICARE from certain proposed taxes. Additionally, certain members in Congress are advocating on behalf of the military and military retirees.

Rep. Joe Wilson (R-S.C.), ranking member on the House Armed Services personnel subcommittee, has gotten the House bill amended to insure that military families and retirees don’t have to “pay to play” and has gotten DoD exempted from certain employer requirements.

“The purpose of this amendment is to shield the men and women of our armed forces from onerous mandates and possible coverage deterioration as a result of this bill’s complex new health care governing scheme. Specifically, I believe we must exempt TRICARE from the “pay or play” employer mandate and other benefit mandates that would place an additional burden on this program that serves military personnel and their families,” said Rep. Wilson.

The ranking member of the Veterans Affairs Committee, Rep. Steve Buyer (R-Ind.), got two amendments accepted by Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.), chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee. The amendments would allow veterans, military personal and their families to retain the choice of keeping their respective TRICARE and Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) health coverage and obtain additional private or public health insurance, and allow the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Veteran Affairs to continue to have sole authority over the respective health care systems.

“Under the [original] health care plan, veterans would be subject to taxes because the VA health care plan would not have recognized as an acceptable health care plan,” shared Rep. Buyer.

ROA and The Military Coalition has sent a letter to every member of Congress emphasizing “that the unique identity and role of the military TRICARE and VA health delivery systems – including their non-taxable status – are preserved under any national health plan that Congress may develop”.

Some members have voiced apprehension that changes to Medicare will have changes to TRICARE and TRICARE for Life. One version of the bill would base provider fees on the Medicare fee scale plus 5 percent, which could stabilize what TRICARE can pay doctors. ROA

is trying to further analyze to see what impact, if any, exists. Further, ROA is seeking dialogue with TRICARE contractors to ascertain their perspective on member concerns. The Association is working with 50 other associations, who will be proactive if problems arise.

Any votes in the Senate or House are being postponed until late September or early October. This gives ROA members an opportunity to call local offices, or meet with your elected officials during the August recess as members of Congress will not be returning to Washington D.C. until September 8th. Constituent feedback is important on this issue.