

PRESS RELEASE

March 22, 2010

TRICARE protection legislation passes House, sent to Senate

WASHINGTON - During the debate regarding national health care this weekend, a bill protecting TRICARE beneficiaries passed 403-0 Saturday with bipartisan support. The members of the Reserve Officers Association and its advocacy arm helped garner that backing.

Rep. Ike Skelton (D-Mo.), chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, introduced H.R.4887 late Friday to ensure TRICARE beneficiaries will be unaffected by the National Health Care plan. The language in the legislation is very similar to that suggested by ROA in letters sent to Chairman Skelton and Rep. Howard P. "Buck" McKeon (R-Calif.), HASC ranking member, in December 2009 seeking such protections for TRICARE beneficiaries.

Following a legislative alert, ROA members sent hundreds of e-mails to Congress using ROA's "write to congress" website feature emphasizing the need to include protective language in any version of the final national health care bill. Between ROA's efforts and contacts made by other concerned citizens, Congress paid attention.

The approved legislation will maintain Department of Defense authority over military healthcare, and individual plans will be recognized as qualifying for tax exemptions under the new National Health Care system.

"No TRICARE or Non-Appropriated Fund (NAF) health plan beneficiary will be required to purchase additional coverage beyond what they already have," Chairman Skelton said. "However, to reassure our military service members and their families and make it perfectly clear that they will not be negatively affected by this legislation, my bill, H.R. 4887, explicitly states in law that these health plans meet the minimum requirements for individual health insurance."

The bill, H.R.4887, will now be sent to the U.S. Senate for consideration. The Senate will only be considering this protective language, as the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act has already been sent to President for signature. This bill acts as an amendment to the National Health Care plan as if it was included in the original bill.

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Rep. Steve Buyer (R-Ind.), ranking member on the House Veterans Affairs Committee, attempted to introduce H.R. 4894 language to protect veterans' health care yesterday. While less successful, Buyer was promised that the bill's concerns would be addressed at a future session.

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