



AFGE Leads Fight to Prevent Dismantling of VA Health Care System

In the aftermath of the Walter Reed fiasco, questions have been raised as to whether the country is prepared to take care of our dedicated veterans. As more and more military personnel return home from Iraq, Afghanistan and other conflict-ridden parts of the world, these questions are no longer on the back-burner. The idea of privatizing health care for veterans is currently being floated on the Hill and in some of the smaller media markets.

Veterans' organizations have strongly opposed sending veterans to private hospitals because they know first hand that VA hospitals have a unique capability to best serve veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury and other combat injuries. VA hospitals have been hailed, respectively, by the New York Times and the U.S. News and World Report as being the "true future in American health care" and "a model of top-notch care." There can be no doubt that when it comes to caring for our veterans, nobody does it better than the women and men working in the VA health care system.

But years of not ramping up staffing and resources to meet the growing and diverse needs of veterans have taken a serious toll on the VA healthcare system. Staffing levels at VA facilities across the country are driven by administrative budget dictates—not veterans'

needs. And instead of insisting on mandatory funding for VA and hiring enough staff to support the VA's mission, some are now suggesting that we turn over the responsibility of caring for our nation's veterans to the private sector.

Vouchers/Credit Cards

While it can be argued that the VA funding process has not been very responsive to the growing needs of the veteran population, sending our veterans to for-profit medical centers with a credit card and pre-set spending limits is a terrible idea at best. At worst, it is tantamount to breaking this nation's contract to take care of the brave men and women who protect our rights, liberty and freedom.

The concept in whatever form is not new nor is the consequence: the end of affordable, accessible, quality health care designed for veterans. Vouchers and credit cards mean privatization pure and simple. It would dismantle the current veterans health care system and move veterans into the unregulated, over priced, insensitive corporate health care system -- the boondoggle that is failing to covering over 40 million Americans and failing to serve tens of millions more. Can you imagine a veteran with a pre-existing condition trying to get treated in privatized veterans health program?

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