

Washington, DC - Congressman John Barrow (GA-12) was part of a successful bipartisan effort this week to fight a new proposal that could force veterans to use their private insurance to pay for the treatment of combat-related injuries. On Wednesday, a letter signed by Barrow and over sixty members of Congress from both parties was sent to President Obama strongly opposing a new proposal under consideration by the Obama administration to allow the VA to bill veterans' private insurance companies for the treatment of service-connected injuries or disabilities.

This could lead to an increase in health care premiums for veterans, and may also discourage employers from hiring veterans who have been injured in combat.

The administration announced yesterday that it would not move forward with the proposal.

"President Obama was right to take back this suggestion, and I'm glad he did," said Barrow. "His record of support for our veterans and military families is strong, and this proposal just didn't reflect that. I support the President, but I'll never shy away from speaking up whenever I think he's on the wrong track - especially when it comes to the men and women who serve our nation in the armed services."

Under current policy, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is responsible for paying for the treatment of any injuries or disabilities resulting from a veterans' service to their country. Veterans, or their private insurers, are currently responsible for paying for health care costs that are unrelated to their military service.

The letter applauds the Obama Administration's efforts to increase funding for the VA and its plans to expand employment opportunities for veterans:

"We know you are committed to expanding employment opportunities for veterans. Already this year, your administration and Congress have worked to create countless jobs for veterans returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but this proposal would undermine our efforts."

The full text of the letter to President Obama:

March 17, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We first want to take this opportunity to thank you for the clear commitment your administration's budget outline makes to our nation's veterans. The proposed 10 percent increase in discretionary funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for next fiscal year is truly historic. We believe the 2010 budget will ensure the VA never again faces the chronic under-funding that prevented countless veterans from receiving the health benefits they have earned.

While we strongly support your plans to increase funding for the VA by \$25 billion over the next five years, it is with equal conviction that we oppose the proposal to bill veterans' private health insurance plans for care and treatment of service-connected injuries or disabilities.

We do not give our veterans health care - they earn it - and it would be unacceptable for the VA to ask our veterans to pay for the treatment of injuries received while serving our nation in uniform. That responsibility belongs to the VA, and it would be wrong to outsource the responsibility of covering the care of those veterans to private insurance companies.

Additionally, this proposal could harm our veterans and their families in unintended, yet very serious ways, jeopardizing their families' health care and even negatively affecting veterans' employment opportunities. Billing a veteran's private health insurance for the treatment of service-connected injuries could lead to increased health care premiums, and could potentially discourage employers from hiring veterans.

We know you are committed to expanding employment opportunities for veterans. Already this year, your administration and Congress have worked to create countless jobs for veterans returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but this proposal would undermine our efforts.

We urge you to take this proposal off the table, and let us instead focus on ensuring that our veterans receive the full care and benefits they have earned. The moral obligation our nation has to our veterans demands nothing less. We are happy to discuss these issues with you further as we move toward a final budget for the VA.

We would like to thank you again for your commitment to improving care for the men and women who have borne the battle, and who have sacrificed their health and well-being in serving their country. Thank you for your service to our nation.

Sincerely,

Glenn Nye
Anne Kirkpatrick

John Hall
Gabrielle Giffords
Diane Watson
Larry Kissel
Steve Kagen
Eric Massa
Bill Foster
Bart Stupak
Harry Teague
Dan Boren
Michael Arcuri
John Barrow
Jerry McNerney
Tom Perriello
Carol Shea-Porter
Travis Childers
Rob Wittman
Ben Lujan
Tom Rooney
Sanford Bishop
Dina Titus
Ciro Rodriguez
Joe Sestak
Betsey Markey
Madeleine Bordallo
Suzanne Kosmas
Marion Barry
Alan Grayson
Harry Mitchell
Dennis Kucinich
Michael Michaud
John Dingell
William Delahunt
Ron Klein
Ben Chandler
Mazie Hirono
Betty Sutton
Robert Wexler
Rick Larson
Tim Bishop
John Boccieri
James Oberstar
Mary Jo Kilroy
Collin Peterson
Leonard Boswell
Lois Capps

Stephanie Herseth Sandlin
Daniel B. Maffei
Mike Honda
Debbie Halvorson
Michael McMahon
Mike McIntyre
Phil Hare
Charles Rangel
Lincoln Davis
Dennis Cardoza
Charlie Wilson
Bobby Bright
Gary Peters
Joe Courtney
Jim Himes
Jason Altmire
Peter Welch
Martin Heinrich
Parker Griffith
Mike Ross

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