

By Robert Gates, Secretary of Defense

As Secretary of Defense, the health and well-being of America's men and women in uniform is my highest priority.

Our troops and their families can be re-assured that the health care reform legislation being passed by the Congress will not negatively impact the TRICARE medical insurance program, as it already meets the bill's quality and minimum benefit standards. This was clarified by a vote in the U.S. House of Representatives yesterday and is expected to be re-affirmed by the Senate.

The President and I are committed to seeing that our troops, retirees and their families will continue to receive the best quality health care.

By Eric Shinseki, Secretary of Veterans Affairs

As Secretary of Veterans Affairs, I accepted the solemn responsibility to uphold our sacred trust with our nation's Veterans. Fears that Veterans health care and TRICARE will be undermined by the health reform legislation are unfounded. I am confident that the legislation being voted on today will provide the protections afforded our nation's Veterans and the health care they have earned through their service. The President and I stand firm in our commitment to those who serve and have served in our armed forces. We pledge to continue to provide the men and women in uniform and our Veterans the high quality health care they have earned.

President Obama has strongly supported Veterans and their needs, specifically health care needs, on every major issue for these past 14 months – advance appropriations, new GI Bill implementation, new Agent Orange presumptions for three additional diseases, new Gulf War Illness presumptions for nine additional diseases, and a 16% budget increase in 2010 for the Department of Veterans Affairs, that is the largest in over 30 years, and which has been followed by a 2011 VA budget request that increases that record budget by an additional 7.6%.

To give our Veterans further assurance that health reform legislation will not affect their health care systems, the Chairmen of five House committees, including Veterans Affairs Chairman Bob Filner and Armed Services Chairman Ike Skelton, have just issued a joint letter reaffirming that the health reform legislation as written would protect those receiving care through all TRICARE and Department of Veterans Affairs programs.

By Tammy Duckworth, Assistant Secretary of Veterans Affairs

As Assistant Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, a constant concern for me is having our Veterans dragged into partisan politics. Unfortunately the debate over health reform has seen that happen far too many times, and at the VA we often have to correct misinformation and assure Veterans that the care they rely on will not be taken away from them.

One of the concerns we are hearing the most now is whether health reform will affect the care Veterans receive under the VA system.

Let me be unambiguous: The healthcare that Veterans receive through the VA system, including dependents of certain veterans enrolled in the CHAMPVA program, will be safe and sound under health reform. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs would continue to maintain sole authority over the system and for enhancing the quality and access for all eligible Veterans.

In addition, TRICARE will continue to be available for all eligible servicemen and women, and their families. Those who are covered by TRICARE would meet the shared responsibility requirement for individuals to have insurance, thereby exempting such members of the uniformed services and dependants from being assessed any sort of penalty. The President has made it clear publicly and to me that he is committed to ensuring that America's servicemen and women have high quality care, and with health reform that commitment remains very much intact.

I have personally seen what a devastating medical condition can cost. Had I been injured on the freeway and not in combat, it is likely that I would be bankrupt even though I had medical insurance through my civilian employer. I personally receive my world class healthcare from the VA and as a dependent on my husband's Tricare eligibility. This bill is good for our nation and our Veterans and Service Members and their families can be reassured that their benefits are safe.