

The Privatization of VA Health Care Boondoggle

Written by Buzz Davis, Army Veteran & Activist

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Privatization of VA Health Care is the Largest Corporate Boondoggle since Medicare Part D & Medicare Advantage.

STOUGHTON - Republicans have tried to **privatize** Veterans Affairs (VA) health care since 1946. After 68 years, they succeeded. In August, the VA was substantially privatized by Congress and Pres. Obama - possibly 3 million of the 6.5 million veterans presently receiving VA care will get healthcare at private hospitals and clinics. Tens of billions of taxpayer dollars will be wasted. Tens of thousands of VA workers will lose their jobs as facilities are closed. And we will lose the major example of cost effective health care in America.

Nearly all the Democrats in Congress voted for the privatization bill (*Veterans' Access to Care Through Choice, Accountability & Transparency Act* of 2014) signed with fanfare by Pres. Obama in August.

Private care will cost taxpayers 20% to 30% more than VA health care. VA health care is proven to be of better quality, with shorter appointment wait times than the private sector. Patient satisfaction surveys are higher at the VA than at most private care facilities.

Thus, taxpayers will be paying more money for:

- Lower quality care,
- Care vets may be less satisfied with and
- Care that will be slower than VA care.

It's a bad law for veterans and taxpayers. But private care CEOs and stockholders will profit greatly. It is to last only two years but will be extended like every tax cut for the rich or corporations. Then conservatives will argue that VA hospitals should be closed because so few veterans are using them.

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It's a repeat of the hat trick Pres. Bush pulled with Medicare Part D and the Medicare Advantage (MA) programs.

You all remember the great Republican Medicare prescription drug and the Medicare Advantage programs. Republicans have called for privatizing Medicare since enactment in 1965. Under Bush, in 2004, they succeeded in establishing a prescription drug programs that wastes billions per year by not following the VA's lead and requiring Medicare to bid all drugs.

Congress also privatized Medicare by using the MA program which places insurance companies in charge of a senior's Medicare. Nearly 30% of seniors are in these MA plans. In 2012 Medicare Advantage cost \$34.6 billion more to provide health care than if the same number of seniors had been in the traditional Medicare program! Privatization does NOT save money. Usually the privatization of government services costs taxpayers more - not less. And quality and corruption problems soon follow.

So how did the Republicans bamboozle all those Dems?

1. WE HAVE A FAILED CONGRESS. They all wish to be re-elected in November. They needed some issue that they could pass in a bipartisan manner that would get the voters' attention. The fraudulently run Phoenix VA hospital provided the issue. Soon we learned 160,000 veterans, who were new to the VA system, were not getting the health care they needed for months or a year or more.

FACTS: The VA system is overloaded with patients, is massively understaffed and needs billions of dollars of updated and additional facilities to serve the influx of aging vets and War on Terror vets. That's the basic cause for the 160,000 vets not receiving timely healthcare. The VA made an extraordinary effort and sent most of those 160,000 vets to private care. Thus the VA solved the problem for these vets before Congress cut the final deal.

The VA is big. With over 1,700 facilities and 6.5 million patients, it's the largest medical system in the USA. It is the best example of single payer/single provider health care in

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America. It has over 86 million appointments a year. On any given day, over 6 million appointments are on the schedule books. The VA proved that 84% of the 6 million appointments were 14 days or less from the time of the appointment. This is far quicker than the private sector average of about 18 day wait times. The VA reported 10% or 620,000 appointments are 31 days or longer away.

2. BAIT AND SWITCH: The Republicans argued the 160,000 vets were the problem and privatization was the solution. When the VA solved that problem, the privatizers did the huckster two step, switched problems and said the problem is the 10% of veterans who wait more than 30 days and the 36% who live more than 40 miles from a facility.

The new law states veterans living more than 40 miles from a facility (2.34 million vets) and the 10% of veterans with appointments over 30 days (.66 million vets) be offered private care. Thus nearly 3 million may be sent to private care.

The "crisis" started because 2.5% (160,000) veterans were poorly served by VA management. The resolution of the "crisis" ended with up to 46% of all the veterans served by the VA will possibly be sent to private care facilities!

This law is supposed to terminate the privatization effort by September 30, 2016. By that time the government will have wasted over \$25 billion on sending vets to private care. The special interests will demand the law be extended beyond 2016.

Citizens need to contact the President & Congressional members urging them to Fix & Staff the VA - Don't Privatize It! Tell them privatizing the VA is a "special interest get rich scheme." Veterans who have served this nation deserve better than to be pawns to make the rich richer.

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