



VADM Norbert R. Ryan, Jr. USN (Ret)
President

November 18, 2015

Ms. Nancy Schlichting
Chairperson, VA Commission on Care
1575 I Street, NW
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Ms. Schlichting,

On behalf of the more than 390,000 members of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) and their families, I am writing to thank you for your letter of September 30, 2015, and for your invitation to engage with the Commission on Care through your process of deliberation.

As you know, in May 2014, MOAA sent a letter to President Obama urgently recommending he establish an independent, high-level commission to examine the VA health care system for the nation's veterans in the 21st century because of reports of secret waiting lists at the VA hospital in Phoenix, Ariz. Our membership saw this as a unique opportunity to take a fresh look at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care. We are pleased the President and Congress seized on this opportunity by establishing the Commission in law.

Like you, MOAA is very concerned about the tight deadline and the massive level of effort that will be required of the commissioners in producing your final report to Congress by February 2016. As such, in April of this year, MOAA joined with several veterans organizations sending a letter to the President and Senate and House leadership requesting the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014 (Choice Act), be amended to provide the Commission with sufficient time and resources to fulfill its complex mission. A copy of our letter is enclosed for your reference.

In our view 180 days does not provide nearly enough time for a comprehensive and thorough examination of all the issues involved in order reach agreement on specific findings and recommendations for delivering health care to millions of veterans over the next 20 years or more. It is important that MOAA ensures the views, desires and needs of our veterans and their families are made known during your deliberations.

As you craft your recommendations in your interim report to Congress due this month, MOAA respectfully requests amending the Choice Act to allow more time for the Commission to do its work. Additionally, MOAA respectfully requests a recommendation that the Veterans Service Organizations listed with the enclosed letter, be allowed to appear before the Commission and present the views of the veterans and the family members we serve.

Thank you again for the opportunity to work with you. MOAA looks forward to assisting the Commission in transforming the VA through this very critical effort. A member of your staff may contact CDR René A. Campos, USN, Ret., Deputy Director of Government Relations, at 703-838-8134 or renec@moaa.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Norbert Ryan', is written over a horizontal line.

Enclosure

April 27, 2015

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to urge you to support actions necessary to strengthen and support the work of the “Commission on Care” required by Section 202 of Public Law 113-146, the “Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014.” Specifically, we are asking that the Act be amended to provide the Commission with sufficient time and resources to fulfill its complex mission; that you subsequently and expeditiously appoint the members of the Commission to begin their vital work; and that you refrain from taking any permanent actions related to the matters in which the Commission will study and make recommendations.

As you know, the VACAA was enacted in order to provide both short-term and long-term solutions to address problems that some veterans have accessing timely and convenient health care at some locations around the country. Among its many provisions, the law authorized a Commission to study and make recommendations on how to improve the timely delivery of health care to veterans over the next two decades. For the Commission to be successful, it must be provided both sufficient time and resources to conduct thorough research and analysis before making its recommendations.

The law requires that members of the Commission be appointed no later than August 7, 2015. Each of the Senate and House leaders is authorized to appoint three members of the Commission, with you also appointing three members as well as designating the Chairman. The first meeting of the Commission must take place not later than 15 days after eight members have been appointed. The law then allows the Commission only 90 days to produce an interim report with both findings and recommendations for legislative or administrative actions, and then only 90 additional days to submit its final report.

In our view, 90 days does not provide nearly sufficient time for a newly constituted Commission of 15 individuals – each with their own unique background, experience and understanding of the current VA health care system – to comprehensively examine all of the issues involved, to conduct and review sufficient research and analysis, and to discuss, debate and reach agreement on specific findings and recommendations that could change how health care will be delivered to millions of veterans over the next twenty years. In addition, the Commission is required to review the results of an independent assessment of the VA health care system being undertaken by a private sector entity or entities. However, that independent assessment may not even be completed before the Commission is required to report its recommendations. Based on these two facts, we strongly recommend that the Commission be provided 12 months to submit any interim report, and another 6 months before submitting its final report. In addition, we urge you to work with Congress to ensure that the Commission has all the resources it needs to arrive at findings and recommendations that are based on its own independent analysis and judgement.

With these changes in place, we would urge you to expeditiously appoint the members of the Commission so that it can begin this important work. In making your selections, we urge you to ensure that the interests and perspectives of veterans are most prominent in the work of the

Commission. While we certainly understand the need to consider all points of view, including those of the private sector, it is imperative that financial considerations never take precedence over the quality and safety of health care provided to wounded, injured and ill veterans. Therefore, we urge you to consider appointing members who are veterans themselves and who have firsthand knowledge of and experience with the VA health care system.

Since enactment of the VACAA, there has been continued discussion in Congress, in the Administration, among veterans and by the public about how best to strengthen and reform the VA health care system. There has also been some discussion about ideas that would radically reorganize or even dismantle the VA and privatize all veterans health care. We believe that maintaining a robust VA health care system is an essential element to ensure that veterans receive high-quality, timely and accessible health care. Given the importance of these matters, no permanent, systemic changes should be initiated until after the Commission has had sufficient opportunity to consider how best to deliver health care to veterans for the next two decades, submitted its recommendations, and then allowed sufficient opportunity for other stakeholders and Congress to engage in a debate worthy of the men and women who served.

We thank you for your consideration of our requests and pledge to work with you and this Commission to ensure that America's veterans have timely access to high quality health care that they have earned through their service and sacrifice.

Respectfully,



Garry J. Augustine
Executive Director
Washington Headquarters
Disabled American Veterans



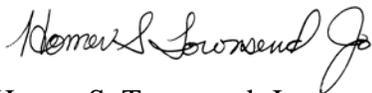
Robert E. Wallace
Executive Director
Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States



Verna L. Jones
Executive Director
The American Legion



Matthew Miller
Chief Policy Officer
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America



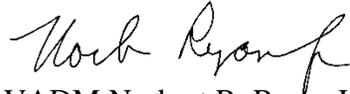
Homer S. Townsend, Jr.
Executive Director
Paralyzed Veterans of America



Rick Weidman
Executive Director for Policy
and Government Affairs
Vietnam Veterans of America



Al Avina
Executive Director
Blinded Veterans Association



VADM Norbert R. Ryan, Jr., USN (Ret.)
President
Military Officers Association of America

- c: The Honorable Johnny Isakson, Chairman, Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee
 The Honorable Richard Blumenthal, Ranking Member, Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee
 The Honorable Jeff Miller, Chairman, House Veterans' Affairs Committee
 The Honorable Corrine Brown, House Veterans' Affairs Committee