

## House Backs Smith Amendment to Promote VA-DoD Health Care Sharing Partnerships

**Veterans' Chairman Assembles Broad, Bipartisan Coalition For Proposal Increasing Medical Care Options for Veterans, Military Personnel and Families**



(Washington, DC) -- The House of Representatives late last night adopted an amendment offered by Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Chris Smith (NJ-4), which will move the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs towards greater cooperation and collaboration in the delivery of health care to veterans, military personnel and their families.

"With demand for health care services on the rise for both the VA and DoD, it is imperative that we maximize the efficient use of existing federal resources," said Smith. ***"My amendment accomplishes this by providing additional incentives and putting additional pressure on both DoD and VA to move forward with commonsense, practical steps to create new partnerships between their two massive health care systems,"*** he said.

"Across the country, there are countless locations where veterans and military medical facilities could work together to increase the availability of medical services to both populations, particularly in the case of expensive specialty medical care," said Smith. "Moreover, through joint procurement efforts, they can save hundreds of millions of dollars that can be reinvested in expanded health care services," he said.

***"Most importantly, my amendment will not in any way compromise the quality or variety of care available to military veterans, military personnel or their families,"*** said Smith. ***"Instead it will expand health care services because any savings achieved will be reinvested locally,"*** he said.

"While statutory authority to allow resource sharing has existed for more than 20 years, the latest figures tell us that the level of sharing between the VA and DoD remains extremely low, accounting for less than 1% of their combined health care budgets," said Smith. "My amendment challenges this statue quo by requiring the VA and DoD to establish at least five health care resource sharing projects at locations where both have significant medical facilities," he said.

"In addition, my amendment would establish a permanent joint committee in the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs to provide stronger strategic direction and oversight of sharing initiatives, and would authorize \$30 million over each of the next three years to reward sharing innovations," Smith said.

The Smith Amendment is the result of tremendous cooperation between the Veterans Affairs and Armed Services Committees, as well as military and veterans organizations, and is supported by The American Legion, VFW, Paralyzed Veterans of America and Disabled American Veterans.

Below are excerpts of endorsements of the Smith Amendment:

*"On behalf of the members of Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) I want to express our support for your amendment to H.R. 4546... We believe there are many areas where sharing health care resources can improve care and reduce costs in both systems."*

-- Richard B. Fuller, National Legislative Director

Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA)

*"On behalf of the 2.7 million members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) and our Ladies Auxiliary, I am pleased to offer our strong support for the amendment you are to offer to H.R. 4546... We strongly believe that improved VA-DOD health resource sharing will greatly benefit our veterans, our active duty military and our military retirees."*

-- Robert E. Wallace, Executive Director

Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW)

*"The American Legion has long supported the goal of improving the quality and access of health care through the sharing and coordination of VA - DoD health care resources. This bill is a solid first step toward achieving that goal."*

-- Steve A. Robertson, Director, National Legislative Commission

The American Legion

*"We agree that DoD and VA should commit their respective departments to exploring new ways for significantly improving health resources sharing and to building organizational cultures supportive of health resources sharing. This provision gives strong incentives for increased collaboration between the respective departments and is an initial step forward to achieving this goal."*

-- Joseph A. Violante, National Legislative Director

Disabled American Veterans (DAV)