

**Coburn Amendment \_\_\_\_: Strikes Section 301, which would expand VA eligibility to high-income, non-compensatable, and non-disabled veterans**

*“..Washington—from Congress to the Pentagon—must reassess what laws, regulations, and rules can be changed to ensure that benefits and other decisions Veterans Affairs makes are beyond reproach and based on the best facts available.*

*Let’s ensure that the department’s limited resources are focused on its core mission rather than dispersed in an effort to remedy every possible problem for every veteran. Remember, when everyone is first priority, no one is.”*

**- Former VA Secretary Anthony Principi, WSJ Op-ed, Aug 28, 2013**

S. 1982 provides little relief to veterans suffering due to mismanagement at VA. Yet, it greatly expands the mission of the VA to include providing services to many veterans (Priority Group 8) not previously eligible for care.

Care for these non-service connected veterans was excluded from the VA’s priority groups so that VA could focus its limited resources on our veterans with service-connected disabilities. Currently, to receive health care thru the VA a veteran must generally have a service connected disability, transitioning into civilian life from the military, or have an annual income under set threshold levels. Non-service connected veterans must be below a certain income threshold to seek care at VA.

**S. 1982 would expand VA coverage to all priority group 8 veterans (these are high-income, noncompensatable and not-disabled veterans), whose only other option for health care coverage is Obamacare.**

In other words, under this bill, if you are a high-income, non-disabled veteran and the only health coverage you have available to you is an Obamacare exchange, then you will now qualify for VA services.

So, the only thing worse than being covered by the VA, where veterans are waiting for weeks to see a doctor and literally dying because of the medical malpractice at the VA, is being in an Obamacare exchange.

**This amendment would strike this expansion (section 301) from the legislation, which will ensure the VA remains focused on service-connected disabled and increasing the quality of care for the more than 6 million veterans currently in the VA system.**

Lowering the current requirements to receive VA health care would flood the VA health care system. Just like the VA has no idea how long the waiting lines for veterans to see their doctors, the VA also has little understanding of just how many veterans will now qualify for VA coverage with this change. However, according to an estimate from the Concerned Veterans for America, it is possible at least 15 million veterans will now be dumped into the system. That is more than double the existing veterans in the VA.

### **S. 1982 Essentially Exempts Millions of Veterans from the Health Care Exchanges**

As this bill would significantly expand VA healthcare immediately, in the future many more could potentially qualify—many of whom are conceivably the young and healthy Americans that are expected to purchase healthcare thru the Obamacare exchanges.

While S. 1982 would exempt millions of veterans from Obamacare, it does not shield them from the harmful effects of Congress failing to provide proper oversight of VA and its attempts to add new burdens on the VA health care system without considering how this will affect health care for our wounded and disabled veterans.

### **Veterans Group Opposes this Expansion**

Concerned Veterans for America represents veterans and families of veterans, is dedicated to promoting policies that will preserve freedom and liberty. They recently announced their opposition to this bill, in an op-ed, which I would like to place in the record.

In their letter, James Ferguson, a retired Marine, explains the nine month wait most veterans must endure to learn if they will even receive VA benefits, and the repeated delays and denials of care in the existing

system. And then he says this, “So how do some in Washington propose responding to this failure? Incredibly, they now propose vastly expanding the VA’s responsibilities – thereby ensuring the ultimate collapse of an already dysfunctional system.”

James has it right, and this bill gets it wrong. We cannot fulfil our current promises to our nation’s heroes and we should not make more promises we be unable to keep.

Congress should not expand VA services until we are able to fulfill our current promises to our veterans—many whom have sacrificed greatly in the last 13 years our nation has been at war, and others who have fought in previous wars to defend our nation and preserve our freedoms.

### **Richard Burr Described Section 301 Yesterday on the Floor**

“As a matter of fact, section 301 of the Sanders bill would expand eligibility of the VA health care system. It would qualify to enroll in the VA health care as priority 8 veterans if they do not have access to health insurance except through a health exchange and do not qualify for higher priority.

“Before getting into my concerns about this affected section and what impact it would have on VA, I wish to comment on how this section has been drafted. The section says:

“If a veteran qualifies as a priority 8 veteran and has no other option but the health exchange under the Affordable Care Act, they could enroll in the VA.

“Let me read that again:

“If a veteran qualifies as a priority 8 veteran and has no other option but the health exchange under the Affordable Care Act, they can enroll in the VA.

“We have just mandated that everybody in this country--except when the President delays the mandate--has to be under the Affordable Care Act and they are part of the health exchange. Here we are saying to priority 8 veterans, if your only option is the health exchange, we will let you opt into the VA. Well, if the health exchange is that good, why would we dare risk all other veterans who have service-connected disabilities or low incomes

having to wait behind people who were provided health care out of the health exchange?

“Some priority 8 veterans may even qualify for a subsidy under the exchange, something they would not receive if they were to enroll in VA health care. I don't know, are they concerned these veterans will be unable to find a plan that meets their needs? Everybody else in America was shoved into it. Why should we be concerned about them?”