

TOOMEY, Mr. BOOZMAN, Mr. MORAN, Mr. THUNE, Mr. SCOTT, Mr. ENZI, and Mr. GRAHAM):

S. 2424. A bill to provide veterans with the choice of medical providers and to increase transparency and accountability of operations of the Veterans Health Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, it has been almost 2 months since allegations that some 40 veterans died while waiting for care at the Phoenix VA were first made public. Since that report, we have learned of similar allegations of gross mismanagement and data manipulation at 42 VA medical facilities across the U.S. More troubling, according to the Office of the Inspector General's preliminary report, 1,700 veterans in the Phoenix VA Health Care System who thought they were about to receive care were never even placed on the VA's Electronic Waiting List and are "at risk of being forgotten or lost in Phoenix HCS's convoluted scheduling process". Today, it is clear that delaying medical care and manipulating records to hide those delays in care is systemic through the Department of Veterans' Affairs health system. This has created in our veterans' community a crisis of confidence toward the VA—the very agency that was established to care for them.

Today, I joined Senators COBURN, BURR, and FLAKE to introduce the Veterans Choice Act of 2014. This bill would, principally, empower veterans with greater flexibility when choosing their medical care and increase transparency and accountability within the VA to ensure that it delivers quality care to our veterans in a timely manner. Specifically, it would give veterans the option to go to a different doctor if the VA can't schedule an appointment within a reasonable time or if the veteran lives too far away from a VA medical facility. Additionally, this bill would prohibit scheduling or wait-time metrics/goals from being used as factors to determining performance awards or bonuses. It would also require the Secretary of the VA to punish employees who falsify data, including civil penalties, suspension or termination. And, empower the Secretary of the VA to remove any top executive at the VA if the Secretary determines that his performance warrants removal.

Put simply, unlike some other proposals that have been made to reform how the VA delivers care, this bill would squarely address the root causes of the tragic circumstances that have brought us to this point.

For almost all this century, Americans have been fighting in faraway places to make this dangerous world safer for the rest of us. They have been brave. They have sacrificed and suffered. They bear wounds and mourn losses they will never completely recover from—and we can never fully

compensate them for. But, we can care for the injuries they incurred on our behalf and provide for their physical and emotional recovery from the battles they fought to protect us. Quality care for our veterans is among the most solemn obligations a nation must pay, and we will be judged by God and history by how well we discharge ours.

Indeed, we must be worthy of the sacrifices made on our behalf. How we care for those who risked everything for us is the most important test of a Nation's character. Today, we are failing that test. We must do better tomorrow. Much better.

For the 9 million American veterans who depend on the VA for their health care, and for the families whose tragic stories we have heard over the last two months, who I know are still grieving their losses, it is time to provide our veterans with the care, choice, and accountability that they so rightly deserve. I am pleased to be associated with the bill Senator BURR, Senator COBURN and Senator FLAKE introduced today, which would help the nation achieve those laudable, necessary goals. I urge my colleagues—on both sides of the aisle—to support it.

#### SUBMITTED RESOLUTIONS

##### SENATE RESOLUTION 464—DESIGNATING JUNE 2014 AS "NATIONAL APHASIA AWARENESS MONTH" AND SUPPORTING EFFORTS TO INCREASE AWARENESS OF APHASIA

Mr. JOHNSON of South Dakota (for himself and Mr. KIRK) submitted the following resolution; which was considered and agreed to:

S. RES. 464

Whereas aphasia is a communication impairment caused by brain damage that typically results from a stroke;

Whereas aphasia can also occur with other neurological disorders, such as a brain tumor;

Whereas many people with aphasia also have weakness or paralysis in the right leg and right arm, usually due to damage to the left hemisphere of the brain, which controls language and movement on the right side of the body;

Whereas the effects of aphasia may include a loss of, or reduction in, the ability to speak, comprehend, read, and write, but the intelligence of a person with aphasia remains intact;

Whereas, according to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (referred to in this preamble as the "NINDS"), strokes are the fourth-leading cause of death in the United States;

Whereas strokes are a leading cause of serious, long-term disability in the United States;

Whereas the NINDS estimates that there are approximately 5,000,000 stroke survivors in the United States;

Whereas the NINDS estimates that people in the United States suffer approximately 795,000 strokes per year, with about 1/3 of the strokes resulting in aphasia;

Whereas, according to the NINDS, aphasia affects at least 1,000,000 people in the United States;

Whereas the NINDS estimates that more than 200,000 people in the United States are afflicted with aphasia each year;

Whereas the people of the United States should strive to learn more about aphasia and to promote research, rehabilitation, and support services for people with aphasia and aphasia caregivers throughout the United States; and

Whereas people with aphasia and their caregivers envision a world that recognizes the "silent" disability of aphasia and provides opportunity and fulfillment for people affected by aphasia: Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved*, That the Senate—

(1) designates June 2014 as "National Aphasia Awareness Month";

(2) supports efforts to increase awareness of aphasia;

(3) recognizes that strokes, a primary cause of aphasia, are the fourth-largest cause of death and disability in the United States;

(4) acknowledges that aphasia deserves more attention and study to find new solutions for people experiencing aphasia and their caregivers;

(5) supports efforts to make the voices of people with aphasia heard, because people with aphasia are often unable to communicate with others; and

(6) encourages all people in the United States to observe National Aphasia Awareness Month with appropriate events and activities.

##### SENATE RESOLUTION 465—COMMEMORATING THE CENTENNIAL OF WEBSTER UNIVERSITY

Mr. BLUNT (for himself and Mrs. MCCASKILL) submitted the following resolution; which was considered and agreed to:

S. RES. 465

Whereas in 1915, the Sisters of Loretto established Webster University in Saint Louis, Missouri, as one of the first Catholic colleges for women that is located west of the Mississippi River;

Whereas Webster University has campuses in 8 different countries, introducing people in Europe, Asia, and Africa to United States educational programs, helping to spread United States culture and ideas around the globe, and serving the educational needs of people abroad;

Whereas in 1974, Webster University became one of the first universities in the United States to operate on a military base;

Whereas in 2014, Webster University is located on military bases across the country, serving all branches of the military and directly helping more than 7,700 students who are active members of the Armed Forces, veterans, or direct relatives of individuals with military connections;

Whereas Webster University has been a leader in online education since 1999, and more than 9,000 students are taking courses in the Webster University Online Learning Center, a program that provides quality higher education to students who have access to the Internet and are residing anywhere in the world;

Whereas since 1915, Webster University has conferred more than 184,000 degrees at campuses around the world, including nearly 80,000 degrees in the greater Saint Louis area, demonstrating a local commitment and offering a global education;

Whereas Webster University has a diverse student body and is routinely lauded by organizations working on diversity issues;

Whereas Webster University is the alma mater of more than 160,000 proud alumni; and