

Senator Joe Machin
Opening Statement for the Record
Markup - November 29, 2017
S.____ - Caring for Our Veterans Act of 2017

Thank you Mr. Chairman and thank you Ranking Member Tester for your leadership on this piece of community care legislation. Taking care of our veterans is one of the most important tasks we have as United States Senators.

West Virginia is one of the most patriotic states in the country. Nearly one out of every ten West Virginians is a veteran, and we owe it to them to work together in a bipartisan way to give them the care they deserve. I am pleased to say that I think we have done this in this bill.

When I meet West Virginia veterans, the Choice program is the topic I hear about the most. My veterans do not like the arbitrary 40 miles/30 day rules; they do not like third party administrators; and, they like receiving care at the VA when it is possible.

The hope is that this bill before us today will let veterans and their doctors, instead of bureaucrats and government contractors, make decisions that are best for the veteran. Issues with the Choice program make up a significant part of my office's casework. I have heard stories like a West Virginia veteran driving 3½ hours to Pittsburgh for routine shots because the CBOC is less than 40 miles, but it doesn't offer the right immunization. It makes no sense.

This bill also establishes new quality standards, creates new opportunities for veterans to get walk-in care, and expands opioid monitoring provisions to include non-VA care providers so it will be harder to game the system.

Finally, I am thrilled that the caregivers bill was included in this package and I want to particularly thank Senator Murray for her leadership on this issue for many years. I joined her bill in March after hearing from many veterans and their families in West Virginia on how important it was to expand this program.

Forty percent of West Virginia's veterans are Vietnam veterans. They were not shown a lot of appreciation when they came home. It is incumbent upon us to show it to them now.

Any bill of this magnitude will likely have issues that reveal themselves once implemented. I will continue to work with the Chairman, Ranking Member, and every member of this committee in a bipartisan way to ensure that our veterans are given the care they deserve.