



(April 27, 2016)

In order to further improve the lines of communication and to respond to the concerns between the National VA Council and you our members, I have established a National VA Council Briefing. This NVAC Briefing will bring you the latest news and developments within DVA and provide you with the current status of issues this Council is currently addressing. I believe that this NVAC Briefing will greatly enhance the way in which we communicate and the way in which we share new information, keeping you better informed.

Alma L. Lee

National VA Council, President

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**In This Briefing:** [MCCAIN: Here's My Plan To Reform The VA](#)

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In an exclusive op-ed for Task & Purpose, Arizona Sen. John McCain makes the case for VA reform.

Veterans today are returning home to one of the most supportive environments in decades. It is a welcome achievement for our country — especially following the bitter homecoming that my fellow comrades and I were met with following the Vietnam War.

But while veterans are coming home to a nation that is committed to help them transition to civilian life through job recruitment and skills training programs, the bureaucratic system is failing in other critical areas.

First and foremost, our veterans are not receiving the quality health care they have earned and deserve. Despite enacting historic VA reform legislation more than a year ago that provided billions of dollars of funding for additional VA doctors and nurses, wait times at the VA continue to rise. Veterans who are eligible to receive the new Veteran Choice Card to visit a health care provider in their community are facing hurdles to both access and use it. For a nation that greatly values the service and sacrifice of our veterans, this is a national scandal.

That's why I recently announced my [“Care Veterans Deserve”](#) action plan, which will address some of the most urgent problems plaguing the VA. Most critically, the plan makes the Veteran Choice Card pilot program that we passed in 2014 permanent and universal. This would ensure that every service-connected disabled veteran — no matter where they live or how long they are waiting for an appointment — can get the care they need.

I refuse to send our veterans back to the hidden wait lists that led to the scandal of denied and delayed care in the first place. [According to a recent Gallup poll](#), the American people refuse to do so, too; 91% of its respondents say that disabled veterans should be allowed to get their health care from any provider that accepts Medicare, not just the VA.

In addition to ensuring veterans have flexibility to receive care from their community doctors, the legislation also addresses the never-ending appointment wait times by extending VA hours, keeping it open at night and weekends, opening walk-in clinics to treat veterans with minor injuries, extending VA pharmacy hours, and mandating the VA undergo peer reviews from some of the best providers in the country for health care. These are commonsense solutions that we can and should enact now.

Additionally, workforce data shows veterans are not serving in top leadership roles and the VA only makes minor efforts to hire veterans into low entry-level positions. Today, only 13% of VA hospital directors are veterans, with the majority of senior leaders having served as civilian VA bureaucrats. The VA must do a better job of recruiting returning service members to serve at the VA and cultivate qualified veterans for key leadership positions. By doing so, we can leverage their deep and direct experience to improve veterans' health care.

Helping service members pursue national service opportunities at the VA and elsewhere is not just good for veterans — it's also good for the country. Today, our ports of entry are badly understaffed, due in part to delays in applicant background investigations. This challenge has in turn increased trade-stifling commercial traffic at ports while leaving our borders less secure. In order to resolve the hiring backlog, I worked with Sen. Jeff Flake to expedite the hiring of veterans as Customs and Border Protection officers at understaffed U.S. ports of entry. Our bill

addresses current deficiencies by recruiting service members as they leave active duty and enter the job market — many who may enter the application process with an active security clearance — to serve as CBP officers. This tackles a critical gap in national security while providing veterans with vital opportunities to continue serving and protecting the nation.

For the men and women who have risked everything for our freedom and security, we owe nothing less than to help them seize opportunities when they return home. We must demand higher standards of care and accountability within the VA; we should expand our job market and employment opportunities; and as importantly, we need to welcome veterans into our neighborhoods because they serve a greater good in our local communities. The courage, resourcefulness, and fearless leadership that come naturally to our warfighters only makes our societal fabric stronger.

I am proud to call Arizona home and I am emboldened by the veterans who choose to live in this great state. Thank you to each and every veteran, service member, and family for your sacrifice, tireless dedication, and unwavering commitment to protect our nation