

**REVENUE: No revenue impact**

**FISCAL: No fiscal impact**

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<b>Action:</b>	Be Adopted
<b>Vote:</b>	7 - 0 - 1
<b>Yeas:</b>	Boone, Esquivel, Freeman, Komp, Riley, Weidner, Cowan
<b>Nays:</b>	0
<b>Exc.:</b>	Matthews
<b>Prepared By:</b>	David Molina, Administrator
<b>Meeting Dates:</b>	4/2

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**WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:** Urges Congress to enact legislation to fully fund health care for all honorably discharged veterans and their dependents. Recognizes that veterans should be provided health care benefits they have earned regardless of income status, place of residence or war era.

**ISSUES DISCUSSED:**

- The need to fully fund Veterans' Administration (VA) medical care
- Challenges to modest-income earning veterans
- VA health care funding from a discretionary to a mandatory program
- The need to examine health care disparities and strengthen VA care
- Rising medical costs severely hampering timely access to quality health care for disabled veterans
- Widespread support among veterans and families, veterans advocacy organizations, public officials, business and community leaders
- President Obama has recognized the problem and has prioritized funding in his budget

**EFFECT OF COMMITTEE AMENDMENT:** No amendment.

**BACKGROUND:** Oregon has approximately 270,000 veterans that are either enrolled in a non-Veterans' Administration (VA) health care program, including state programs, or have no health care at all. Only 80,000 veterans are currently enrolled in VA health care programs. After a veteran enrolls, eligibility is verified and the individual is assigned a category group based on specific eligibility status. Priority group ranges from one to eight with one being the highest priority for enrollment. Health care is one of many guarantees promised to past generations of military service members, including World War II, Korean and Vietnam War. However, the VA eliminated this benefit when it evolved into categorization. Additionally, the VA reversed its previous policy and established in 2003 a ban on enrolling veterans with an income of \$30,000 or more per year, regardless of war periods. Proponents of Senate Joint Memorial 3 assert that this ban has denied care to millions of veterans.

At the federal level, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has a several month backlog of adjudication claims directly impacting disability claims from honorably discharged veterans. Post 9/11 veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflict are provided five years of comprehensive health care, but they can expect to wait four to six months for a positive result; non-Iraq and Afghanistan veterans can expect to wait six months to one year for an answer. An appeal can take fourteen months minimum and an appeal to an appeal can take two years minimum. In 2008, nearly 20 percent of 300,000 military service members who have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan report post traumatic stress disorder and other debilitating injuries. In addition to fixing the VA benefits bureaucracy by transforming the paper benefit claims process to an electronic one to reduce errors and improve timeliness, the Obama Administration has made fully funding VA medical care a top priority

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***This summary has not been adopted or officially endorsed by action of the committee.***