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**SENATORS McCAIN, AYOTTE, CORNYN, CRUZ, ERNST, FLAKE,
GRAHAM & TILLIS INTRODUCE THE *CARE VETERANS DESERVE
ACT***

Washington, D.C. – U.S. Senators John McCain (R-AZ), Kelly Ayotte (R-NH), John Cornyn (R-TX), Ted Cruz (R-TX), Joni Ernst (R-IA), Jeff Flake (R-AZ), Lindsey Graham (R-SC) and Thom Tillis (R-NC) today introduced the *Care Veterans Deserve Act of 2016*, legislation that would expand access to care at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) while enhancing choice and flexibility in veterans health care. The legislation supplements and expands on the major reforms enacted by the *Veterans' Access to Care through Choice, Accountability and Transparency Act of 2014*, which was signed into law in the wake of the scandal of denied and delayed care at VA hospitals around the country.

The *Care Veterans Deserve Act* would address a major complaint by today's veterans of never-ending wait-times for appointments. For example, the bill would require the VA to extend pharmacy hours to nights and weekends, and open VA hospitals to volunteer community providers interested in seeing veterans during their off-hours. The bill would also enable veterans to visit walk-in clinics without needing to undergo preauthorization from the VA or provide copayment. Most importantly, the bill would make the pilot Veterans Choice Card program enacted by the 2014 VA reform legislation universal and permanent so that all eligible veterans have the flexibility to see the doctor of their choice without having to worry about wait-time and distance restrictions.

“While major progress has been made in reforming the VA, much more needs to be done to tear down bureaucratic hurdles that are denying veterans the flexible, quality care they have earned and deserve,” said Senator McCain. “This legislation is critical to expanding access to care for working veterans, while ensuring every veteran has flexibility and choice – no matter where they live or how long they are waiting for care. We have a long way to go to reform the VA, but this legislation offers important short- and long-term solutions to ensure our veterans receive the care they deserve now and well into the future.”

“The mismanagement at the VA that led to the denial of care for so many of our nation's veterans was unacceptable, and the Choice program made important strides by offering more flexibility and options to veterans seeking health care,” said Senator Ayotte. “I'm pleased to support this bill to permanently extend the Choice program and will continue to work with my colleagues across the aisle to ensure we are holding

the VA accountable and continuing to make improvements to non-VA care programs to give our veterans the care they have earned.”

“The brave men and women who took a solemn oath and selflessly served our country deserve the best medical care available – not more excuses and ineffective bureaucracy,” said Senator Cornyn. “I’m proud to support this reform effort to remove these remaining barriers and take proactive steps to ensure Texas veterans receive the care they need in a timely manner.”

“Our veterans deserve the very best care our nation can provide. Unfortunately, the VA is still a very real and tragic failure of socialized medicine, despite past congressional efforts to reform the broken system,” said Senator Cruz. “Just last month, VA Office of Inspector General reports confirmed that the VA is still unable to reliably provide services to veterans. It is past time to fully empower veterans with genuine choice, competition, and quality health care. I’m encouraged by this meaningful step in the right direction of putting veterans in charge of their health care decisions, and I’m proud to cosponsor this effort with my colleagues.”

“Our veterans deserve nothing less than quality, timely care, yet, the VA continues to fail our men and women,” said Senator Ernst. “The Care Veterans Deserve Act takes critical steps toward addressing these unacceptable shortcomings, and improves accessibility, health care, and oversight to ensure our veterans are receiving the care they deserve. In addition, this legislation includes my reforms to improve health care access for disabled or rural veterans by expanding telehealth services provided by the VA, including mental health care treatment, for veterans from the comfort and privacy of their own homes.”

“In the aftermath of the Phoenix VA crisis, Congress made a commitment to provide our veterans with the quality care that they deserve. With commonsense solutions that will increase flexibility and expand access, the Care Veterans Deserve Act builds on earlier reforms to ensure that promise is kept,” said Senator Flake. “I’m pleased to join Senator McCain and my colleagues to introduce this vital piece of legislation and I urge my colleagues to get behind this bill to ensure its prompt passage.”

“How we treat our veterans is a statement about who we are as a nation,” said Senator Graham. “There is no doubt they have been let down in the past by the VA, but that is changing. Our legislation continues building upon the reforms and improvements which have already been made. Our veterans deserve and should receive the very best care available in a timely manner. I’m proud to support this important legislation which gives veterans more control over their health care and hope we can soon pass it into law.”

“The Care Veterans Deserve Act will make it easier for the brave men and women who have served our nation to have access to timely and reliable health care services,

regardless of where they live,” said Senator Tillis. “The legislation also continues efforts to apply the private sector’s best practices to the VA system, which will cut down on waste and inefficiency and ultimately help deliver higher quality care for our veterans.”

CARE VETERANS DESERVE ACT OF 2016

Give Veterans Access to Walk-In Clinics

- **Allow all veterans enrolled the VA health care system to visit walk-in clinics without pre-authorization from the VA or copayment by the veteran**
- **Require the VA to contract with a national chain of walk-in clinics to provide veterans access**
- **Ensure walk-in clinics notify the VA of veteran services in order to ensure patient health records are up to date**

Expand VA Operating Hours to Nights and Weekends

- **Require the VA to extend VA pharmacy hours to Saturday, Sunday, federal holidays and until 8pm on weekdays to provide comparable pharmacy services offered by retail pharmacies**
- **Enable qualified, community health care providers to offer volunteer services to veterans on nights and weekends**

Make the Veteran Choice Card Program Permanent and Universal

- **Make the pilot Veteran Choice Card program permanent**
- **Make every qualified veteran – no matter where they live or how long they are waiting for care – eligible for the Veteran Choice Card**

Best-Practices Peer-Review

- **Encourage the VA to undergo a best-practices peer-review by some of the best hospital networks in the nation such as the Cleveland Clinic and Mayo Clinic**
- **Prioritize review of VA hospitals with the longest wait-times or with the worst health outcomes as determined by the VA**

Expand Telemedicine at the VA

- **Allow VA health care professionals licensed, registered or certified in a state to use telemedicine to provide treatment to veterans in other states.**