

Previously, I told you that, while we respect members' strong opinions on both sides of the national health care reform argument, MOAA would refrain from taking a position on the social and political aspects and devote our limited resources to safeguarding military/VA beneficiaries' health care benefits, protecting against taxation of those benefits, improving access to providers, and ensuring long-term sustainment of Medicare and TRICARE For Life (TFL).

MOAA members have generated more than 130,000 messages to Congress in support of these goals, and legislators of both parties have responded by including provisions aimed at holding military and VA beneficiaries harmless.

That said, there's never any guarantee that Congress won't change something about Medicare, TRICARE, TFL, or VA coverage, and we fully expect such changes could come in the future.

In that context, it's important not to miss the forest for the trees.

It's the next round of "adjustments" that poses the greatest concern – the ones that will be required to address the problem of the millions of baby boomers about to become eligible for Medicare, which the current legislation doesn't address at all.

Most Medicare cuts in the pending legislation are the relatively less painful ones – \$118 billion from eliminating the extra subsidy to the Medicare Advantage HMO program (which was sold to Congress as a cost-saver, but actually costs 14% more per person than Standard Medicare; DoD is cutting back on its TRICARE Prime HMO system for the same reason), cutting about \$150 billion from non-rural hospitals (which the hospital associations say they can handle because expanding insurance coverage to most Americans will mean they won't have to eat the cost of serving the uninsured), and cutting back abuses in medical equipment (under current systems, Medicare will buy you a wheelchair you might only need a few months, or allow a company to rent you one for life for a permanent condition).

These are things most of us would probably push to consider if it were our own money paying for them (which it actually is).

The real issue under national health care reform is that the money from these Medicare savings will be used to fund expansion of health insurance coverage to those who don't have it now. It's hard to argue that reducing the number of uninsured would be a bad thing. But using the relatively "easy" Medicare savings initiatives to fund that means that when the baby boomers start swamping Medicare and Social Security in the next few years, Congress will be forced to look at more painful ways to fund that need.

Some in government already are pushing for a new entitlements commission to recommend ways to rein in entitlement spending. The last such commission, in 1994-95, considered a swath of changes – not just for Social Security and Medicare, but also for military and federal civilian health care, retired pay, VA disability compensation, and more.

It took years of tough battles, but we dodged most of those bullets, though we had to suffer COLA delays for several years until we won them back. We expect those reviews and threats to be renewed again – with even more force – within the next few years.

MOAA is already preparing for a major battle on those topics, to make sure our government leaders in both the Executive and Legislative Branches understand the important distinction between social insurance programs like Medicare and Social Security and earned compensation for a career of arduous military service and sacrifice.

One hundred thirty thousand messages will not be enough to win that battle. It will take millions, and that starts with one person – you. If you know someone who is not an MOAA member, please make it clear to

them that MOAA is the lead organization looking out for them (there's a reason MOAA has been named the top military or veterans lobbying association for three years in a row by *The Hill*). Tell them that we need all hands on deck – and we need to count them in our membership ranks now.

Having a strong, active membership equates to clout, and clout is what we will need to protect our health care entitlement. So, if you know someone who is not yet an MOAA member, forward them this e-mail and have them call our Member Service Center at (866) 739-7106 and mention this message to receive a special introductory one-year membership price of only \$15.

Thank you for your continuing support.

All the best,

VADM Norb Ryan Jr., USN (Ret)
President