

## VA Needs Money For Staff, Facilities & Better Management, Not Privatization

Written by Ian Smith, Madison

Thursday, 23 June 2016 08:49 - Last Updated Thursday, 23 June 2016 09:17

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***The VA is America's largest single payer and single provider system. VA healthcare is NOT broken. Congress and presidents must step up to the plate and fund the staffing and facilities needed to meet the escalating demand for veteran care.***

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MADISON - In order for the Veterans Affairs Department to "fix" the significant problems at many of the 1,700 VA hospitals and clinics across America, it needs nearly \$18 billion more for additional staff and new and remodeled facilities said the acting VA Secretary in 2014.

He did not get the money from Congress. Thus the VA limps along with ever growing number of veterans to serve, not enough staff and not enough facilities to meet the needs.

Additionally, the VA has weak management in some areas and drastically needs stronger whistleblower protections.

Conservatives have pushed for privatization of veterans' healthcare for decades. Recently, the Koch brothers recharged the effort to PRIVATIZE the VA.

Why? They conclude billions can be made by closing down the VA and sending 7 million veterans into private healthcare. How? As private care merges into ever larger corporations, as health insurance and drug companies do the same, the costs for services and drugs increase due to the companies having to pay back the hundreds of billions in loans the CEOs borrow to buy each other's companies. Stock holders, Wall Streeters and CEOs make billions while patients pay ever increasing costs. As the 1%ers know, monopolies are very profitable.

Those who support ill-advised PRIVATIZATION cover their **pure, simple GREED** with big tears about, "We just want to "help" our wonderful veterans!"

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Privatizers listen up:

- Fact: 64% of us 22 million vets DO NOT WANT THE VA PRIVATIZED.
- Fact: 72% of us who use VA hospitals DO NOT WANT THE VA PRIVATIZED.
- Fact: VA healthcare costs 20% LESS than Medicare. Medicare is 10% less costly than private care. **Jumping from VA healthcare to private care may cost taxpayers 30% more.**
- Facts: VA care is peer ranked among the best healthcare systems nationally. Vets are just as satisfied with their VA care as are patients in private care.
- Fact: Between 2009 and 2016 the number of veterans served by the VA increased 22% to nearly 7 million.
- Fact: The VA was overloaded and understaffed in 2009. With all the praise Congress heaps on veterans, they continue to underfund the VA. Result: Staffing and facility shortages continue.

The Koch propaganda machine marches on deaf to facts. Their front group, Concerned Veterans of America, preaches privatization. Dutiful media keep cranking out the stories about poor vets and the efforts to help them by privatization. Obama, Sanders and Clinton all support No Privatization of the VA. The major Republican candidates and Trump support privatization.

The VA is America's largest single payer and single provider system. VA is a massive high quality, cost efficient, proactive healthcare system that stands as a threat to all insurance companies and for-profit and non-profit hospital systems. It provides 115 million outpatient visits plus surgery, RXs, therapy, mental health and nursing homes for a cost of \$65 billion per year. If VA healthcare was shut down today this amount of care would cost 30% more, private care hospitals could not accept the additional patient load and veterans would likely receive lower quality care.

VA healthcare is NOT broken. Congress and presidents must step up to the plate and fund the staffing and facilities needed to meet the escalating demand for veteran care.

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We served because presidents and Congress members sent us into combat or peace time forces. We get injured, permanently damaged, our lives are impacted with some of us never being able to work again. We demand presidents and Congress members pay the VA costs and help us they promised!

PRIVATIZATION OF THE VA WILL SOLVE NOTHING. It will exacerbate America's problem of supporting veterans and their families when in need.

The American Federation of Federal Employees (AFGE) is holding press conferences across America to help the public understand the VA's problem and successes. AFGE is one of America's largest unions with nearly 700,000 workers of whom a third are VA workers.

It is AFGE members who have been risking their careers making whistleblower complaints against bad management practices in the VA. Whistleblowers have stood up for quality care in the VA and *real* rather than *fake* appointment lists. They have personally payed for their courage with damaged careers as a result of retaliation by VA managers in many hospitals across the nation. Congress must enact a powerful whistleblower protection act!

Wednesday, June 22, 2016, at noon AFGE and other leaders will speak out for VA healthcare and against Privatization in front of the Madison VA hospital.

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*Ian Smith, an Army Veteran, a native of Madison, retired from a successful career with the VA spanning 40+ years, and is a long time, staunch Unionist having served two terms as President of a 1,400 member Local 1732 and remains a delegate to SCFL and WI AFL-CIO. You can contact Ian at [iks205@sbcglobal.net](mailto:iks205@sbcglobal.net)*