

## 3/15/2007 Moran Introduces Legislation to Increase Access to Health Care for Rural Veterans

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - Congressman Jerry Moran today introduced legislation to provide more health care options for veterans living in rural areas. The Rural Veterans Access to Care Act would enable rural veterans enrolled in the Veterans Affairs (VA) health system to receive care closer to home at a local hospital or community physician's office rather than traveling long distances to VA facilities.

"It is not right to penalize some veterans because of where they live," Moran said. "Though we have been successful at opening several VA outpatient clinics in Kansas, not every community has a facility or is close to a VA hospital. Lack of access to VA care remains a real challenge for veterans living in rural areas and too often means these veterans are forgoing the care and treatment they need. The result is that rural veterans are in poorer health than their urban counterparts. It is time to provide these veterans the access to health care they have earned."

Today, 44 percent of the nation's military recruits come from rural areas. This legislation allows the most underserved rural veterans - old and young alike - to take advantage of existing rural health providers, such as local hospitals, community health centers and rural health clinics. To qualify, a veteran must live at least 60 miles from a VA primary care facility like an outpatient clinic, 120 miles from a VA hospital or 240 miles from a VA specialized care facility. Additionally, the VA would be required to fill prescriptions written by non-VA doctors for these veterans.

"This legislation just makes good sense," said Dr. Bob Moser of Tribune, member of the Commission on Government Advocacy for the American Academy of Family Physicians. "We continue to deal with more and more veterans getting older, but the other side is that we will continue to see the need for access for younger veterans. I am excited about this legislation to provide better health care access to our rural veterans by utilizing the system of care already established locally along with the benefits offered by the VA health system."

"Anything we can do to increase access to the VA is good," said Charles Yunker, Department Adjutant of the Kansas American Legion. "Often our veterans - especially our older veterans - do without if faced with a long, inconvenient trip to a VA facility."

Moran is a senior member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee where he serves on the Subcommittee on Health.

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