



INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF PROFESSIONAL & TECHNICAL ENGINEERS AFL-CIO & CLC

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2020 IFPTE Issue Brief

116th Congress

Protecting our nation's Veterans – it is the least we can do

Overview - If there is one issue before Congress that should be bipartisan it is protecting the interests of our Veterans. From providing quality Veterans health care through the Veterans Administration (VA), to protecting the benefits that come with the GI bill, to ensuring that Veterans preference hiring and retention protections stay in place in the federal government, all of these matters and others that impact the lives of our Veterans should be addressed fairly and without partisanship. However, there have been some Veterans concerns, such as efforts to privatize the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), attack worker protections for VA employees, and erode Veterans Preference, that have unfortunately put Veterans in the middle of partisan Hill battles.

Veterans Preference and VA Choice - Many of the veterans who currently work for the federal government are assisting our current fighting men and women at the Department of Defense (DOD), while thousands more are serving their fellow Veterans at the VA. Many of these jobs are very complex, require specialized skills and the unique skill sets necessary to work directly with veterans, some who are coming back home with the physical and mental injuries that result from war. Despite these unique skill sets, some lawmakers on Capitol Hill are attempting to do away with and/or erode Veterans Preference. Sadly, the Fiscal Year 2016 (FY16) National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which was ultimately signed into law, included language that waters down Veterans Preference in a Reduction-in-Force (RIF) situation. Congress has also passed legislation to massively expand the Veterans Choice program, which is the first misguided step toward privatization of VHA health services. While IFPTE objected to these efforts, they ultimately became law.

Veteran employment is great for the taxpayer – It is true that the investment taxpayers have made in our former military personnel who are now employed in the private sector, State and Local governments and within the federal government provide veterans with the training, knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to hit the ground running upon entering civilian employment. This is particularly true with jobs that are highly complex and technical in nature, compared to non-veterans who require the training necessary to properly perform many of the highly technical jobs in today's economy. When it comes to Veterans who enter government service or work for government contractors providing services to the taxpayers, the background and expertise that Veterans bring to their jobs provide a savings for the taxpayer.

2020 IFPTE Legislative Requests:

- Support the bipartisan Retired Pay Restoration Act (H.R. 303, S. 208), to permit retired members of the Armed Forces who have a service-connected disability to receive both disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs for their disability and retirement pay for their military service or combat-related special compensation. **IFPTE urges passage of this HR 303/S 208**

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- Provide retirement equity to graduates of the United States Merchant Marine Academy - Title XI, Section 1115 (P.L. 110-181) of the 2008 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) correctly included language that allows for federal employee retirement service credit for service as a cadet or midshipman at the nation's other four service academies (Air Force Academy, Military Academy, Coast Guard Academy and Naval Academy). However, there was one group of Academy graduates who were not included - those who attended the USMMA. **IFPTE urges House and Senate defense authorizers to include language in their respective Fiscal Year 2021 National Defense Authorization Acts to fix this inequity.**
- Introduce and pass legislation similar to the Veterans TRICARE Choice Act (HR 5458) during the 114th Congress, to close the TRICARE loophole which currently disallows Veterans to concurrently participate in TRICARE and health savings accounts. **IFPTE urges passage of legislation to close the TRICARE loophole**
- Repeal S. 2372, the so-called VA Choice Act, which was passed and signed into law last year, and will likely lead to costly and damaging privatization of Veterans health care services by expanding the VA Choice program. This bill will result in a massive shift of federal resources from VHA facilities to private health facilities, without accountability and justification of better services. This despite findings by the IG, which *found that in a rush to ensure that Choice program contractors receive favorable treatment and fast reimbursement, the VA has overpaid both TriWest and HealthNet almost \$100 million.* Poll after poll shows that Veterans prefer the care provided them at VA run hospitals. **IFPTE recommendation: Introduce and pass legislation repealing S. 2372**
- Repeal S. 1094, the so-called Veterans Accountability & Whistleblower Act of 2017, which was signed into law in 2017 and would significantly erode the due process rights of federal workers facing potential adverse actions. Specifically, the legislation eliminates the ability of workers in a collective bargaining unit from using union negotiated grievance procedures to fairly and efficiently work through the processes of adverse actions. This law is a problem in search of a problem, as past scandals at the VA were not perpetuated by rank and file VA workers, many of whom are Veterans themselves. **IFPTE urges reversal of this law.**