

Republicans Block Bipartisan Duckworth Bill to Help Veterans Afford Health Care

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
November 14 2019 6:04 PM



– Combat Veteran and U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) today went to the Senate floor to call on her colleagues to pass her bipartisan bill, the Veterans Preventive Health Coverage Fairness Act, which would guarantee that Veterans enrolled in the VA system don't have to pay out-of-pocket costs for preventive medications. Currently, every other insured American, including Servicemembers enrolled in TRICARE, are guaranteed access to these preventive drugs without copayments. Republicans rejected Senator Duckworth's request to pass her bipartisan legislation that would prohibit Veterans from being charged copayments for essential drugs and potentially life-saving preventive health medication. Video of Duckworth's remarks on the floor can be found [here](#).

The Veterans Preventive Health Coverage Fairness Act is endorsed by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW), The American Legion, Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) and the Disabled American Veterans (DAV).

Duckworth's full remarks as prepared are below:

Mr. President, I'm disappointed that the majority objected to passing our bipartisan legislation.

Every Senator should support a simple fix to ensure Veterans enrolled in the VA system can obtain preventive medications without out-of-pocket costs.

All Americans deserve access to the best healthcare possible — especially the Veterans who signed up to defend our Nation.

Yet, because of this objection, our Veterans will continue to pay more for essential preventive medications compared to every other insured American.

One of the Affordable Care Act's critical patient protections was prohibiting insurance companies and other health systems, including the Department of Defense's TRICARE, from charging copayments for drugs that are designated as preventive by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force.

The ACA recognized that preventing serious illness, such as heart disease and breast cancer, may help avoid complex and costly medical treatments down the line.

Most importantly, preventive medicine may also increase patient survival odds. That is why the ACA required every insurer to cover preventive medications at no additional cost to enrollees.

The time has come to expand this vital patient protection to cover Veterans enrolled in VA healthcare.

Congress has the power to stop Veterans from being the only insured Americans who are charged copays and out-of-pocket fees for essential drugs and potentially life-saving preventive health medication.

This includes everything from critical vaccinations to common medications, such as aspirin to lower the risk of heart disease, and more advanced drugs, such as tamoxifen inhibitors to lower the risk of breast cancer.

The question is simply: does the Senate majority in this Congress have the will to exercise this power to swiftly fix the problem? Unfortunately, today's objection provided a disappointing answer.

I hope the majority will reconsider its opposition to passing the bipartisan Veterans Preventive Health Coverage Fairness Act by unanimous consent. I am confident that the Democratic House majority would act swiftly to pass S. 1573, if we can get this commonsense bill to that chamber.

After all, I'm confident that if asked, the majority Americans – if not all Americans – would agree that it is simply wrong to force Veterans to pay more for essential preventive medications that are critically important for reducing the risk of heart disease and building bone-density.

This should not be controversial. It's certainly viewed as a commonsense legislative update by the Veterans community. That is why my bipartisan bill has been endorsed by The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, The American Legion, the Disabled American Veterans and the Paralyzed Veterans of America.

Making sure Veterans enrolled in the VA system can obtain preventive medications without paying out-of-pocket should be something every Senator can agree on.

Senate Democrats certainly share this conviction. That is why every Member of the Democratic Caucus agreed to pass the bipartisan Veterans Preventive Health Coverage Fairness Act right now.

Unfortunately, today's objection proves that not every Member of the Republican Conference shares this conviction.

With deep disappointment, I yield the floor and I note the absence of a quorum.