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A Perilous Proposal to Privatize Veterans' Care and End the VA



Charles Tiefer

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WASHINGTON, DC: A House Veterans' Affairs Committee hearing. The witness, Ms. Gipson, suffered a severe back injury while en route to Afghanistan.

A **panel picked largely by Congressional Republicans** floated a proposal last week to eliminate all VA medical centers and outpatient clinics, and dump 9 million unprepared veterans on private sector care.

The VA Commission on Care has fifteen members. Of the seven who backed the leaked proposal, the Commissioner who authored this proposal is Commissioner David Blom, president and CEO of the OhioHealth System. Two others are from the private sector, too – including Commission chairwoman Nancy Schlichting, the CEO of the Henry Ford Health System. **The Koch Brothers – the infamous ultra-right-wing billionaire ideologues – seem to be the driving force.**

Specifically, the proposal would funnel veterans' health care funds to private sector care, primarily for-profit. Gradually VA facilities would get closed. VA eventually would become "primarily a payer," under the proposal. The proposal would apparently deny veterans anything like the VA's recognized expertise in veterans' special injuries.

Congress created the Commission. The Commission now appears to be a way to capitalize on the tumult about VA problems to promote an extreme privatization agenda. A possible agenda is to promote the proposal in this year's Congressional races, and then move some version through Congress next year. The Koch brothers' well-financed backing would move the proposal forward even in a year in which the electorate might choose a President unenthused about it.

Eight veterans organizations – including Disabled American Veterans, American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Vietnam Veterans of America and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America – sent a letter to Commission Chairwoman Nancy Schlichting denouncing the proposal.

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In contrast to these diverse but devoted veterans organizations is the Koch-funded group Concerned Veterans for America. The Koch brothers, through CVA, effectively have two seats on the Commission: one for CVA's official Darin Selnick, and one for the head of AMVETS, which is closely aligned with CVA positions. Koch organizations lavishly funded the nationwide push to create such an organization.