

111TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# H. R. 568

To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the quality of care provided to veterans in Department of Veterans Affairs medical facilities, to encourage highly qualified doctors to serve in hard-to-fill positions in such medical facilities, and for other purposes.

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## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JANUARY 15, 2009

Mr. COSTELLO (for himself, Mr. SHIMKUS, Mr. MITCHELL, and Mr. WHITFIELD) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and in addition to the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

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## A BILL

To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the quality of care provided to veterans in Department of Veterans Affairs medical facilities, to encourage highly qualified doctors to serve in hard-to-fill positions in such medical facilities, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Veterans Health Care  
5 Quality Improvement Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. STANDARDS FOR APPOINTMENT AND PRACTICE OF**  
2 **PHYSICIANS IN DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS**  
3 **AFFAIRS MEDICAL FACILITIES.**

4 (a) STANDARDS.—

5 (1) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter I of chapter 74  
6 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by in-  
7 serting after section 7402 the following new section:

8 **“§ 7402A. Appointment and practice of physicians:**  
9 **standards**

10 “(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall, acting  
11 through the Under Secretary for Health, prescribe stand-  
12 ards to be met by individuals in order to qualify for ap-  
13 pointment in the Veterans Health Administration in the  
14 position of physician and to practice as a physician in  
15 medical facilities of the Veterans Health Administration.  
16 The standards shall incorporate the requirements of this  
17 section.

18 “(b) DISCLOSURE OF CERTAIN INFORMATION BE-  
19 FORE APPOINTMENT.—Each individual seeking appoint-  
20 ment in the Veterans Health Administration in the posi-  
21 tion of physician shall do the following:

22 “(1) Provide the Secretary a full and complete  
23 explanation of the following:

24 “(A) Each lawsuit, civil action, or other  
25 claim (whether open or closed) brought against  
26 the individual for medical malpractice or neg-

1           ligence (other than a lawsuit, action, or claim  
2           closed without any judgment against or pay-  
3           ment by or on behalf of the individual).

4           “(B) Each payment made by or on behalf  
5           of the individual to settle any lawsuit, action, or  
6           claim covered by subparagraph (A).

7           “(C) Each investigation or disciplinary ac-  
8           tion taken against the individual relating to the  
9           individual’s performance as a physician.

10          “(2) Submit a written request and authoriza-  
11          tion to the State licensing board of each State in  
12          which the individual holds or has held a license to  
13          practice medicine to disclose to the Secretary any in-  
14          formation in the records of such State on the fol-  
15          lowing:

16                 “(A) Each lawsuit, civil action, or other  
17                 claim brought against the individual for medical  
18                 malpractice or negligence covered by paragraph  
19                 (1)(A) that occurred in such State.

20                 “(B) Each payment made by or on behalf  
21                 of the individual to settle any lawsuit, action, or  
22                 claim covered by subparagraph (A).

23                 “(C) Each medical malpractice judgment  
24                 against the individual by the courts or adminis-  
25                 trative agencies or bodies of such State.

1           “(D) Each disciplinary action taken or  
2           under consideration against the individual by  
3           an administrative agency or body of such State.

4           “(E) Any change in the status of the li-  
5           cense to practice medicine issued the individual  
6           by such State, including any voluntary or non-  
7           disciplinary surrendering of such license by the  
8           individual.

9           “(F) Any open investigation of the indi-  
10          vidual by an administrative agency or body of  
11          such State, or any outstanding allegation  
12          against the individual before such an adminis-  
13          trative agency or body.

14          “(G) Any written notification by the State  
15          to the individual of potential termination of a li-  
16          cense for cause or otherwise.

17          “(c) DISCLOSURE OF CERTAIN INFORMATION FOL-  
18          LOWING APPOINTMENT.—(1) Each individual appointed  
19          in the Veterans Health Administration in the position of  
20          physician after the date of the enactment of the Veterans  
21          Health Care Quality Improvement Act shall, as a condi-  
22          tion of service under the appointment, disclose to the Sec-  
23          retary, not later than 30 days after the occurrence of such  
24          event, the following:

1           “(A) A judgment against the individual for  
2           medical malpractice or negligence.

3           “(B) A payment made by or on behalf of the  
4           individual to settle any lawsuit, action, or claim dis-  
5           closed under paragraph (1) or (2) of subsection (b).

6           “(C) Any disposition of or material change in a  
7           matter disclosed under paragraph (1) or (2) of sub-  
8           section (b).

9           “(2) Each individual appointed in the Veterans  
10          Health Administration in the position of physician as of  
11          the date of the enactment of the Veterans Health Care  
12          Quality Improvement Act shall do the following:

13               “(A) Not later than the end of the 60-day pe-  
14               riod beginning on the date of the enactment of that  
15               Act and as a condition of service under the appoint-  
16               ment after the end of that period, submit the re-  
17               quest and authorization described in subsection  
18               (b)(2).

19               “(B) Agree, as a condition of service under the  
20               appointment, to disclose to the Secretary, not later  
21               than 30 days after the occurrence of such event, the  
22               following:

23                       “(I) A judgment against the individual for  
24                       medical malpractice or negligence.

1           “(ii) A payment made by or on behalf of  
2           the individual to settle any lawsuit, action, or  
3           claim disclosed pursuant to subparagraph (A)  
4           or under this subparagraph.

5           “(iii) Any disposition of or material change  
6           in a matter disclosed pursuant to subparagraph  
7           (A) or under this subparagraph.

8           “(3) Each individual appointed in the Veterans  
9           Health Administration in the position of physician shall,  
10          as part of the biennial review of the performance of the  
11          physician under the appointment, submit the request and  
12          authorization described in subsection (b)(2). The require-  
13          ment of this paragraph is in addition to the requirements  
14          of paragraph (1) or (2), as applicable.

15          “(d) INVESTIGATION OF DISCLOSED MATTERS.—(1)  
16          The Director of the Veterans Integrated Services Network  
17          (VISN) in which an individual is seeking appointment in  
18          the Veterans Health Administration in the position of phy-  
19          sician shall perform a comprehensive investigation (in  
20          such manner as the standards required by this section  
21          shall specify) of each matter disclosed under subsection  
22          (b) with respect to the individual.

23          “(2) The Director of the Veterans Integrated Serv-  
24          ices Network in which an individual is appointed in the  
25          Veterans Health Administration in the position of physi-

1 cian shall perform a comprehensive investigation (in a  
2 manner so specified) of each matter disclosed under sub-  
3 section (c) with respect to the individual.

4 “(3) The results of each investigation performed  
5 under this subsection shall be fully documented.

6 “(e) APPROVAL OF APPOINTMENTS BY DIRECTORS  
7 OF VISNS.—(1) An individual may not be appointed in  
8 the Veterans Health Administration in the position of phy-  
9 sician without the approval of the Director of the Veterans  
10 Integrated Services Network in which the individual will  
11 first serve under the appointment.

12 “(2) In approving the appointment under this sub-  
13 section of an individual for whom any matters have been  
14 disclosed under subsection (b), a Director shall—

15 “(A) certify in writing the completion of the  
16 performance of the investigation under subsection  
17 (d)(1) of each such matter, including the results of  
18 such investigation; and

19 “(B) provide a written justification why any  
20 matters raised in the course of such investigation do  
21 not disqualify the individual from appointment.

22 “(f) ENROLLMENT OF PHYSICIANS WITH PRACTICE  
23 PRIVILEGES IN PROACTIVE DISCLOSURE SERVICE.—Each  
24 medical facility of the Department at which physicians are  
25 extended the privileges of practice shall enroll each physi-

1 cian extended such privileges in the Proactive Disclosure  
2 Service of the National Practitioners Data Bank.

3 “(g) ENCOURAGING HIRING OF PHYSICIANS WITH  
4 BOARD CERTIFICATION.—(1) The Secretary shall, for  
5 each performance contract with a Director of a Veterans  
6 Integrated Services Network (VISN), include in such con-  
7 tract a provision that encourages the director to hire phy-  
8 sicians who are board eligible or board certified in the spe-  
9 cialty in which the physicians will practice.

10 “(2) The Secretary may determine the nature and  
11 manner of the provision described in paragraph (1).”.

12 (2) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sec-  
13 tions at the beginning of chapter 74 of such title is  
14 amended by inserting after the item relating to sec-  
15 tion 7402 the following new item:

“7402A. Appointment and practice of physicians: standards.”.

16 (b) EFFECTIVE DATE AND APPLICABILITY.—

17 (1) EFFECTIVE DATE.—Except as provided in  
18 paragraphs (2) and (3), the amendments made by  
19 subsection (a) shall take effect on the date of the en-  
20 actment of this Act.

21 (2) APPLICABILITY OF CERTAIN REQUIRE-  
22 MENTS TO PHYSICIANS PRACTICING ON EFFECTIVE  
23 DATE.—In the case of an individual appointed to the  
24 Veterans Health Administration in the position of  
25 physician as of the date of the enactment of this



1 Act, the requirements of subsection (f) of section  
 2 7402A, United States Code, as added by subsection  
 3 (a) of this section, shall take effect on the date that  
 4 is one year after the date of the enactment of this  
 5 Act.

6 (3) APPLICABILITY OF REQUIREMENTS RE-  
 7 LATED TO HIRING OF PHYSICIANS WITH BOARD CER-  
 8 TIFICATION.—The requirements of subsection (g) of  
 9 such section 7402A shall apply with respect to the  
 10 first cycle of performance contracts for directors of  
 11 Veterans Integrated Services Networks beginning  
 12 after the date of the enactment of this Act and each  
 13 subsequent cycle.

14 **SEC. 3. ENHANCEMENT OF QUALITY ASSURANCE BY THE**  
 15 **VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION.**

16 (a) ENHANCEMENT OF QUALITY ASSURANCE  
 17 THROUGH QUALITY ASSURANCE OFFICERS.—

18 (1) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter II of chapter 73  
 19 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by in-  
 20 serting after section 7311 the following new section:

21 **“§ 7311A. Quality assurance officers**

22 **“(a) NATIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE OFFICER.—(1)**  
 23 **The Under Secretary for Health shall designate an official**  
 24 **of the Veterans Health Administration to act as the prin-**  
 25 **cipal quality assurance officer for the quality-assurance**

1 program required by section 7311 of this title. The official  
2 so designated may be known as the ‘National Quality As-  
3 surance Officer of the Veterans Health Administration’ (in  
4 this section referred to as the ‘National Quality Assurance  
5 Officer’).

6 “(2) The National Quality Assurance Officer shall re-  
7 port directly to the Under Secretary for Health in the dis-  
8 charge of responsibilities and duties of the Officer under  
9 this section.

10 “(3) The National Quality Assurance Officer shall be  
11 the official within the Veterans Health Administration  
12 who is principally responsible for the quality-assurance  
13 program referred to in paragraph (1). In carrying out that  
14 responsibility, the Officer shall be responsible for—

15 “(A) establishing and enforcing the require-  
16 ments of that program; and

17 “(B) carrying out such other responsibilities  
18 and duties relating to quality assurance in the Vet-  
19 erans Health Administration as the Under Secretary  
20 for Health shall specify.

21 “(4) The requirements under paragraph (3) shall in-  
22 clude requirements regarding the following:

23 “(A) A confidential system for the submittal of  
24 reports by Veterans Health Administration per-

1       sonnel regarding quality assurance at Department  
2       facilities.

3               “(B) Mechanisms for the peer review of the ac-  
4       tions of individuals appointed in the Veterans Health  
5       Administration in the position of physician.

6               “(C) Mechanisms for the accountability of the  
7       facility director and chief medical officer of each  
8       Veterans Health Administration medical facility for  
9       the actions of physicians in such facility.

10       “(b) QUALITY ASSURANCE OFFICERS FOR VISNs.—

11       (1) The Director of each Veterans Integrated Services  
12       Network (VISN) shall appoint an official of the Network  
13       to act as the quality assurance officer of the Network.

14               “(2) Each official appointed as a quality assurance  
15       officer under this subsection shall be a board-certified phy-  
16       sician.

17               “(3) The quality assurance officer for a Veterans In-  
18       tegrated Services Network shall report to the Director of  
19       the Veterans Integrated Services Network, and to the Na-  
20       tional Quality Assurance Officer, regarding the discharge  
21       of the responsibilities and duties of the officer under this  
22       section.

23               “(4) The quality assurance officer for a Veterans In-  
24       tegrated Services Network shall—

1           “(A) direct the quality assurance office in the  
2       Network; and

3           “(B) coordinate, monitor, and oversee the qual-  
4       ity assurance programs and activities of the Vet-  
5       erans Health Administration medical facilities in the  
6       Network in order to ensure the thorough and uni-  
7       form discharge of quality assurance requirements  
8       under such programs and activities throughout such  
9       facilities.

10       “(c) QUALITY ASSURANCE OFFICERS FOR MEDICAL  
11   FACILITIES.—(1) The director of each Veterans Health  
12   Administration medical facility shall appoint a quality as-  
13   surance officer for that facility.

14       “(2) Each official appointed as a quality assurance  
15   officer under this subsection shall be a board-certified phy-  
16   sician.

17       “(3) The official appointed as a quality assurance of-  
18   ficer for a facility under this subsection shall be a prac-  
19   ticing physician at the facility. If the official appointed as  
20   quality assurance officer for a facility has other clinical  
21   or administrative duties, the director of the facility shall  
22   ensure that those duties are sufficiently limited in scope  
23   so as to ensure that those duties do not prevent the officer  
24   from effectively discharging the responsibilities and duties  
25   of quality assurance officer at the facility.

1       “(4) The quality assurance officer for a facility shall  
2 report directly to the director of the facility, and to the  
3 quality assurance officer of the Veterans Integrated Serv-  
4 ices Network in which the facility is located, regarding the  
5 discharge of the responsibilities and duties of the quality  
6 assurance officer under this section.

7       “(5) The quality assurance officer for a facility shall  
8 be responsible for designing, disseminating, and imple-  
9 menting quality assurance programs and activities for the  
10 facility that meet the requirements established by the Na-  
11 tional Quality Assurance Officer under subsection (a).”.

12           (2) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sec-  
13 tions at the beginning of chapter 73 of such title is  
14 amended by inserting after the item relating to sec-  
15 tion 7311 the following new item:

“7311A. Quality assurance officers.”.

16           (b) BOARD-CERTIFIED PHYSICIAN REQUIREMENT  
17 FOR INDIVIDUALS APPOINTED AS UNDER SECRETARY  
18 FOR HEALTH.—Section 305(a)(2) of title 38, United  
19 States Code, is amended by inserting “shall be a board-  
20 certified physician and” before “shall be”.

21           (c) REPORTS ON QUALITY CONCERNS UNDER QUAL-  
22 ITY-ASSURANCE PROGRAM.—Section 7311(b) of such title  
23 is amended by adding at the end the following new para-  
24 graph:

1       “(4) As part of the quality-assurance program, the  
2 Under Secretary for Health shall establish mechanisms  
3 through which employees of Veterans Health Administra-  
4 tion facilities may submit reports, on a confidential basis,  
5 on matters relating to quality of care in Veterans Health  
6 Administration facilities to the quality assurance officers  
7 of such facilities under section 7311A(c) of this title and  
8 to the quality assurance officers of the Veterans Inte-  
9 grated Services Networks (VISNs) in which such facilities  
10 are located under section 7311A(b) of this title. The mech-  
11 anisms shall provide for the prompt and thorough review  
12 of any reports so submitted by the receiving officials.”.

13       (d) REVIEW OF CURRENT HEALTH CARE QUALITY  
14 SAFEGUARDS.—

15           (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans  
16 Affairs shall conduct a comprehensive review of all  
17 current policies and protocols of the Department of  
18 Veterans Affairs for maintaining health care quality  
19 and patient safety at Department of Veterans Af-  
20 fairs medical facilities. The review shall include a re-  
21 view and assessment of the National Surgical Qual-  
22 ity Improvement Program (NSQIP), including an  
23 assessment of—

24                   (A) the efficacy of the quality indicators  
25                   under the program;

1 (B) the efficacy of the data collection  
2 methods under the program;

3 (C) the efficacy of the frequency with  
4 which regular data analyses are performed  
5 under the program; and

6 (D) the extent to which the resources allo-  
7 cated to the program are adequate to fulfill the  
8 stated function of the program.

9 (2) REPORT.—Not later than 60 days after the  
10 date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary  
11 shall submit to Congress a report on the review con-  
12 ducted under paragraph (1), including the findings  
13 of the Secretary as a result of the review and such  
14 recommendations as the Secretary considers appro-  
15 priate in light of the review.

16 **SEC. 4. INCENTIVES TO ENCOURAGE HIGH-QUALITY PHYSI-**  
17 **CIA NS TO SERVE IN THE VETERANS HEALTH**  
18 **ADMINISTRATION.**

19 (a) INCENTIVES REQUIRED.—

20 (1) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter III of chapter  
21 74 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by  
22 inserting after section 7431 the following new sec-  
23 tion:

1 **“§ 7431A. Physicians: additional incentives for service**  
2 **in hard-to-fill positions**

3 “(a) LOAN REPAYMENT FOR PHYSICIANS WHO  
4 SERVE IN HARD-TO-FILL POSITIONS.—(1) In order to re-  
5 cruit and retain physicians in the Veterans Health Admin-  
6 istration in hard-to-fill positions (as designated by the Sec-  
7 retary for purposes of this subsection), the Secretary shall  
8 repay, for each individual who agrees to serve as a physi-  
9 cian for a period of not less than three years in an Admin-  
10 istration facility in such a position, any loan of such indi-  
11 vidual as follows:

12 “(A) Any loan of the individual described in  
13 paragraphs (1) through (4) of section 16302(a) of  
14 title 10.

15 “(B) Any other loan of the individual des-  
16 igned by the Secretary for purposes of this sub-  
17 section the proceeds of which were used by the indi-  
18 vidual to finance education leading to the medical  
19 degree of the individual.

20 “(2) Each individual seeking repayment of loans  
21 under paragraph (1) shall enter into an agreement with  
22 the Secretary regarding the repayment of loans. Under the  
23 agreement, the individual shall agree—

24 “(A) to perform satisfactory service in a physi-  
25 cian position specified in the agreement in an Ad-  
26 ministration facility specified in the agreement for



1 such period of years as the agreement shall specify;  
2 and

3 “(B) to possess and retain for the period of the  
4 agreement such professional qualifications as are  
5 necessary for the service specified under subpara-  
6 graph (A).

7 “(3) Repayment of loans under this subsection shall  
8 be made on the basis of complete years of service under  
9 the agreement under this subsection. The amount to be  
10 repaid under an agreement under this subsection for a  
11 complete year of service specified in the agreement shall  
12 be such amount, not to exceed \$30,000, for each complete  
13 year of service as the agreement shall specify.

14 “(b) TUITION REIMBURSEMENT FOR PHYSICIAN  
15 STUDENTS WHO AGREE TO SERVE IN HARD-TO-FILL  
16 POSITIONS.—(1) In order to recruit and retain physicians  
17 in the Veterans Health Administration in hard-to-fill posi-  
18 tions (as designated by the Secretary for purposes of this  
19 subsection), the Secretary shall reimburse individuals who  
20 are enrolled in a course of education leading toward board  
21 certification as a physician for the tuition charged for pur-  
22 suit of such course of education if such individuals agree  
23 to serve as a physician in an Administration facility in  
24 such a position.

1       “(2) Each individual seeking tuition reimbursement  
2 under paragraph (1) shall enter into an agreement with  
3 the Secretary regarding such tuition reimbursement.

4 Under the agreement, the individuals shall agree—

5           “(A) to satisfactorily complete the course of  
6 education of the individual described in paragraph  
7 (1); and

8           “(B) upon completion of the course of edu-  
9 cation, to become board-certified as a physician; and

10          “(C) upon completion of the matters referred to  
11 in subparagraphs (A) and (B)—

12           “(I) to perform satisfactory service in a  
13 physician position specified in the agreement in  
14 an Administration facility specified in the  
15 agreement for such period of years as the  
16 agreement shall specify; and

17           “(ii) to possess and retain for the period of  
18 the agreement such professional qualifications  
19 as are necessary for the service specified under  
20 clause (I).

21       “(3) The amount of reimbursement payable to an in-  
22 dividual under paragraph (1) for a year may not exceed  
23 \$30,000.

24       “(4) Any individual receiving tuition reimbursement  
25 under paragraph (1) who does not satisfy the require-

1 ments of the agreement under paragraph (2) shall be sub-  
2 ject to such repayment requirements as the Secretary shall  
3 specify in the agreement.

4 “(5) An individual receiving tuition reimbursement  
5 under paragraph (1) for pursuit of a course of education  
6 shall also be paid a stipend in the amount of \$5,000 for  
7 each academic year of pursuit of such course of education  
8 after entry into an agreement under paragraph (2).

9 “(c) PARTICIPATION IN FEHBP OF PHYSICIANS  
10 WHO SERVE PART-TIME IN HARD-TO-FILL POSITIONS.—

11 (1) In order to recruit and retain physicians in the Vet-  
12 erans Health Administration in hard-to-fill positions (as  
13 designated by the Secretary for purposes of this sub-  
14 section), an individual not otherwise eligible for health in-  
15 surance under chapter 89 of title 5 who agrees to serve  
16 as a physician in an Administration facility in such a posi-  
17 tion for not less than five days per month (of which two  
18 days must occur in each 14-day period) shall be eligible  
19 for enrollment in the health benefit plans under chapter  
20 89 of title 5 on a self only or self and family basis (as  
21 applicable).

22 “(2) The Secretary shall administer this subsection  
23 in consultation with the Director of the Office of Per-  
24 sonnel Management.

1       “(d) ADDITIONAL PROGRAMS.—It is the sense of  
2 Congress that the Secretary should undertake active and  
3 on-going efforts to establish additional incentive programs  
4 to encourage individuals to serve in the position of physi-  
5 cian in the Veterans Health Administration, or otherwise  
6 practice in the Administration, in hard-to-fill positions, in-  
7 cluding, in particular, incentive programs to encourage  
8 more experienced physicians to serve or practice in such  
9 positions.

10       “(e) CONSTRUCTION.—The incentives required under  
11 this section are in addition to any other special pays or  
12 benefits to which the individuals covered by this section  
13 are eligible or entitled under law.”.

14               (2) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sec-  
15 tions at the beginning of chapter 74 of such title is  
16 amended by inserting after the item relating to sec-  
17 tion 731 the following new item:

“7431A. Physicians: additional incentives for service in hard-to-fill positions.”.

18       (b) AFFILIATION OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS  
19 AFFAIRS MEDICAL FACILITIES WITH MEDICAL  
20 SCHOOLS.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall, to the  
21 extent practicable, require each medical facility of the De-  
22 partment of Veterans Affairs to seek to establish an affili-  
23 ation with a medical school within reasonable proximity  
24 of such medical facility.

1 **SEC. 5. REPORTS TO CONGRESS.**

2 (a) REPORT.—Not later than December 15, 2009,  
3 and each year thereafter through 2012, the Secretary of  
4 Veterans Affairs shall submit to the congressional vet-  
5 erans affairs committees a report on the implementation  
6 of this Act and the amendments made by this Act during  
7 the preceding fiscal year. Each report shall include, for  
8 the fiscal year covered by such report, the following:

9 (1) A comprehensive description of the imple-  
10 mentation of this Act and the amendments made by  
11 this Act.

12 (2) Such recommendations as the Secretary  
13 considers appropriate for legislative or administra-  
14 tive action to improve the authorities and require-  
15 ments in this Act and the amendments made by this  
16 Act or to otherwise improve the quality of health  
17 care and the quality of the physicians in the Vet-  
18 erans Health Administration.

19 (b) CONGRESSIONAL VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMIT-  
20 TEES DEFINED.—In this section, the term “congressional  
21 veterans affairs committees” means—

22 (1) the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs and  
23 Appropriations of the Senate; and

24 (2) the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs and  
25 Appropriations of the House of Representatives.

