

US Senate backs bill on health care for vets

June 12 2014, by Matthew Daly



Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nev. speaks to reporters on Capitol Hill in Washington, Tuesday, June 10, 2014, after a Democratic caucus lunch. Responding to the public outcry over lax care at Veterans Affairs health facilities, leaders of both parties plan debate soon on a bill to help vets waiting for months to get medical appointments. The House of Representatives advanced a VA reform bill today that passed 421-0. (AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite)

The Senate has approved a bill making it easier for veterans who have endured long wait times for VA medical care to receive treatment from local doctors instead. The measure closely resembles a bill approved

Tuesday in the House. Lawmakers say they are optimistic a compromise version can soon be sent to President Barack Obama for his signature.

The Senate bill, approved 93-3, would authorize about \$35 billion over three years to pay for the outside care, hire hundreds of doctors and nurses and lease 26 new health facilities in 17 states and Puerto Rico.

The Veterans Affairs Department released an audit this week showing that more than 57,000 veterans have had to wait at least three months for initial appointments. Some vets who asked for appointments never got them.



Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Ky., and GOP lawmakers, from left, Sen. John Barrasso, R-Wyo., Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., and Senate Minority Whip John Cornyn of Texas, face reporters on Capitol Hill in Washington, Tuesday, June 10, 2014, after a Republican caucus meeting. Responding to the

public outcry over lax care at Veterans Affairs health facilities, leaders of both parties plan debate soon on a bill to help vets waiting for months to get medical appointments. The House of Representatives advanced a VA reform bill today that passed 421-0. (AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite)

The controversy over veterans' care could provide Republicans with an issue to criticize Democrats ahead of congressional elections in November. It is also a headache for Obama, who had to accept the resignation of the Veterans Affairs secretary, Eric Shinseki, on May 30 and is actively seeking someone to replace him after the leading candidate pulled out, citing the prospect of a bitter confirmation hearing

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