U.S. Senator Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, applauded the Senate passage of bipartisan legislation that will strengthen healthcare services at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs while streamlining the department's community care programs to ensure veterans receive efficient, timely and quality care, whether inside the VA system or from providers in their communities.

S.2372, the John S. McCain III, Daniel K. Akaka and Samuel R. Johnson VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks Act, called the VA MISSION Act for short, includes some of the most significant reforms proposed to-date to improve the VA's current healthcare delivery system and help provide veterans with more choice and fewer barriers to care.

“The Senate passage of the VA MISSION Act is a major victory for our nation’s veterans who will benefit from more choice and fewer barriers to care,” said Isakson. “I’d like to thank House Chairman Phil Roe, Senator Tester and our committee members from both chambers and on both sides of the aisle for passing this legislation through Congress so quickly. I look forward to sending this to the president’s desk to be signed into law ahead of Memorial Day as a small token of ‘thanks’ to our nation’s veterans for answering the call and defending the freedoms we enjoy today.”

The VA MISSION Act builds on legislation previously introduced by Isakson to consolidate and improve VA community care programs, which allows veterans to receive healthcare services provided by private hospitals and doctors. The legislation also includes provisions to improve VA's ability to hire high-quality healthcare professionals, expand VA caregiver benefits to veterans of all eras and establish a process to evaluate and reform VA's existing facilities to best serve veterans.

The bill also authorizes and appropriates funding for the VA to continue the Veterans Choice Program until the new, streamlined ‘Veterans Community Care Program’ established in this legislation is implemented. Acting VA Secretary Robert Wilkie notified Congress that funding for the program will run out as early as May 31, 2018.

In addition, the legislation will help improve existing VA health care and services by removing barriers for VA healthcare professionals to practice telemedicine, strengthening processes for opioid prescribing by VA and community care providers, and eliminating impediments to hiring and retention of VA healthcare professionals.

The VA MISSION Act received broad support from leading veterans groups that represent millions of veterans in the United States. A group of 38 veteran and military advocacy organizations wrote to the House and Senate in support of
the VA MISSION Act. Read a copy of the letter here.

Both the White House and Acting VA Secretary Wilkie support the bill.

The full title of the legislation was amended on Tuesday, May 15, by House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs chairman U.S. Rep. Phil Roe, R-Tenn., to honor the lasting impact that U.S. Senator John McCain, R-Ariz., the late Senator Daniel Akaka, D-Hawaii, and U.S. Rep. Sam Johnson, R-Texas, have had on the lives of our nation’s veterans.

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