



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON  
**VETERANS' AFFAIRS**  
*Chairman Phil Roe, M.D.*

**S. 114, a bill to authorize appropriations for the Veterans Choice Program**

**Background:**

Three years ago when committee oversight and subsequent media reports uncovered that veterans around the country were waiting for care, Congress passed the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act ([P.L. 113-146](#)), which established the Choice Program. The Choice Program allows veterans who meet certain qualifications to seek care from health care providers outside VA.

The Choice Act included language to state that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is authorized to continue services until August 7, 2017, or until the funds provided in the Choice Act ran out. After VA reported to Congress that funds would be available after the sunset date, Congress passed legislation that was signed into law in April 2017 to eliminate the sunset date for the Choice Program. On June 17, 2017, Secretary Shulkin [notified](#) Congress that, due to an increased demand for care through Choice, VA expects the funding for the Choice Program to be depleted by mid-August.

At a June 2017 hearing on the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) budget, Poonam Alaigh, M.D., Acting Under Secretary for Health at VHA, responded to Chairman Roe's question about what would happen if Congress fails to replenish the Choice fund. Dr. Alaigh [noted](#) that, if Congress fails to act, veterans will not be able to access care outside VA through Choice; wait times will go up to the level they were before the Phoenix waitlist scandal; and Third Party Administrators (TPAs) around the country will be laid off. Secretary Shulkin [told the committee](#) during a March 2017 hearing on community care that allowing the Choice Program to sunset would be a "disaster for American veterans" and warned we would see the "same situation we saw in April 2014 in Phoenix."

S. 114 provides \$2.1 billion to continue the Choice Program for six months while Congress works on other reforms to the Choice Program. It would also authorize 28 major medical facility leases and enhance the recruitment, retention and training of the VA workforce. To offset that, the bill would extend the current \$90 per month limit on pensions paid to veterans residing in Medicaid-funded nursing homes, extend the requirement to collect fees for housing loans guaranteed by VA and extend the authority to utilize other agency income information.