

FRANK TONER LETTER TO THE EDITOR PUBLISHED IN *QUEENS CHRONICLE* 7-12-18

I am Vietnam veteran who is concerned that the Veterans Affairs Mission Act, recently signed by President Trump, will lead to the destruction of the V.A. system, the system best suited to care for me and my fellow veterans.

The bill was sold as a way to help veterans get care from non-VA doctors. But in reality, the legislation threatens the very existence of the V.A. and seems destined to lead to budget cuts for V.A. services, putting the V.A. on a path to cannibalize itself – which will hurt veterans and their families.

I was in the Army from 1968 to 1970 and served as a medic with an artillery group in Vietnam from 1969 to 1970. After discharge, I eventually started a career in administration in New York City Hospitals - so I know a thing or two about bureaucracy and waste in the private health care system. One day in my office, a person, who identified herself as Canadian, asked me how many people worked in my office. I said 36. She said that in Canada it would be about 6. She pointed out Canada has a single-payer system and everyone has a card that just needs to be swiped, thereby eliminating the need for long information gathering and insurance verification. It was what I called “The Bureaucracy of our HealthCare System”.

In 2006, I decided it was a good idea to join the V.A. system. Once enrolled, I found that the only identification I needed was to say my last name and give the last four digits of my social security number. It was the same no matter which clinic or doctor I used. This kind of efficiency saves money, and makes accessing care easier.

A few years later I began to use the V.A. more frequently since I had hearing loss. I was thrilled to get my free hearing aids. Referrals were electronic and quick. The caregivers were friendly and respectful. I started talking to other veterans about their care. The praise for their care was almost unanimous.

Now, the Mission Act is opening doors for conversion to a private care system.

I have great concern over how the plan will be implemented as the President is going out of his way to gain more control and reduce transparency. Trump seems determined to keep congress out of discussions on how the \$50 billion dollar Act will be funded and who decides what facilities are closed. No matter how Trump or Congress try to justify it -- this Mission Act is a smokescreen for destroying and privatizing the V.A.

It is clear Trump listens to those who have pushed V.A. privatization for years. I will continue to fight to strengthen the V.A. and its care for veterans. With a strong well-funded V.A., we can serve our vets who served our country.

It is up to us to voice our concerns to our Congressperson and Senator.