

Tuesday, April 12, 2011
Rules Committee Statement of Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (VA-11th)
Re: Amendment sponsored by Rep. Connolly to H.R. 1217

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for the opportunity to address my amendment, which would require the Secretaries of Health and Human Services, Defense and Veterans Affairs to report to Congress on the prevalence of chronic disease among our active-duty military, veterans and their families. In that report, they also would be required to report on how the repeal of the Prevention and Public Health Fund, as proposed by H.R. 1217, would affect military recruitment and healthy outcomes for our military families.

Repealing the Prevention and Public Health Fund will have real life consequences for thousands of Americans connected to the military. Community-based health centers and clinics provide valuable services to military families in all of our districts, and weakening these institutions would be a disservice.

While we do provide health services to our military families, they often turn to community-based alternatives out of convenience or necessity. Some returning troops face geographic hurdles in accessing their military health care, while others simply may not qualify for certain benefits. In these instances, they turn to their local health centers, clinics and hospitals for care related to everything from physical impairments to Post Traumatic Stress. Even in my own district, which has some of our nation's premier military medical facilities, the Prince William Community Health Center is treating hundreds of active military and veteran patients annually. In fact, more than 200,000 veterans were treated in community health centers across the nation last year.

Better utilization of preventative care is one of the hallmarks of the Health Insurance Reform law. Treating diseases before they get out of hand is critical to our efforts to contain health care costs. The Prevention and Public Health Fund created by the reform law provides grants to state and local health centers to improve community-based health services. Chronic diseases, such as heart disease, cancer, obesity and diabetes, account for 75 percent of overall health spending, so any improvement in treatment of these diseases will yield considerable benefits not only for the patient's health but also our financial health.

In addition, failure to get ahead of chronic diseases can pose a threat to our military readiness. Obesity among our nation's young people, for example, has increased more than three-fold during the last decade, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Those children are more at risk to experience other chronic health conditions as they become adults, which creates a serious concern for our military recruitment efforts. Sec. Gates recently acknowledged the challenge, noting health and weight concerns lead the list of reasons why 75 percent of our young people are ineligible or unavailable to serve in the armed forces.

Given these factors, I think it would be prudent to review the unintended consequences of this legislation. The findings from our military and veteran communities will no doubt reflect similar trends among the general public, and I believe they will show this to be a worthwhile investment. I would ask for your favorable consideration of my amendment, and I yield back. Thank you.