Senators introduce bill to improve veteran health care

Written by By Vanessa Valdivia United States Senator Martin Heinrich for New Mexico
Friday, 30 November 2018 08:13

Bipartisan legislation aims to develop technologies to solve complex problems

WASHINGTON, D.C. — U.S. Sen. Martin Heinrich, D-NM, along with Senators Joni Ernst, R-Iowa; Angus King, I-Maine; and Cory Gardner, R-Colo., introduced bipartisan legislation to help improve veterans' health care by increasing collaboration among federal agencies and authorizing the Department of Energy's national laboratories, including Los Alamos National Laboratory, to develop technologies that solve complex data challenges.

"We need to do everything we can to improve health care for our veterans," Heinrich said. "This is a great example of how our Department of Energy national laboratories like Los Alamos and Sandia can put their high performing computing capabilities to practical use solving complex, big data challenges. I'm hopeful that by using the national labs' advanced data analytics, this innovative program will identify patterns in the VA's data and help improve outcomes for significant veterans' health care challenges like suicide prevention."

Ernst agreed the VA and DOE have a solid partnership in terms of research and development.

"With the bipartisan Department of Energy Veterans' Health Initiative Act, we will see greater collaboration between the two agencies to solve complex data challenges and advance veterans' health care," Ernst said.

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King emphasized the sacrifice veterans have made for the nation through their service.

"They have earned not only our eternal gratitude, but also the best support that we can possibly provide," King said. "In order to live up to our duty, we must strive to improve the care they receive, taking steps like utilizing cutting-edge technology and increasing communication between government agencies. By improving our overall knowledge of the healthcare challenges facing our veterans, we can improve the quality of care they receive."

Gardner said the legislation will help offer veterans "world-class care."

"The Department of Veterans Affairs and our National Labs are already collaborating successfully to benefit our veterans and I'm proud to lead this bipartisan effort with my colleagues to make sure this work continues," he said.

The Department of Energy Veterans' Health Initiative Act is a companion bill to H.R. 6398, which passed the House unanimously on September 25, 2018.

This legislation will build on the current interagency collaborative efforts — like the Million Veterans Program Computational Health Analytics of Medical Precision to Improve Outcomes initiative — by authorizing a program within the DOE to develop technologies to help solve complex data challenges by analyzing data sets from federal agencies, higher education institutions, non-profits and the private industry.

In addition, the bill authorizes a DOE research program to spur development to accommodate for large data sets.

A copy of the bill is available at www.ernst.senate.gov .

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