

VETO OF H.R. 7102

MESSAGE

FROM

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

VETOING

H.R. 7102

AN ACT TO AMEND TITLE 38, UNITED STATES CODE, TO PROMOTE THE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF PHYSICIANS, DENTISTS, NURSES, AND OTHER HEALTH-CARE PERSONNEL IN THE DEPARTMENT OF MEDICINE AND SURGERY OF THE VETERANS' ADMINISTRATION, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES



AUGUST 25, 1980.—Message and accompanying act ordered to be printed

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON : 1980

To the House of Representatives:

I am returning without my signature H.R. 7102, the Veterans Administration Health Care Amendments of 1980, because this bill would provide \$80 million a year to Veterans Administration ("VA") physicians in unwarranted salary bonuses rather than target that amount on veterans themselves.

As President, I have worked with the VA to ensure that the health care provided to our veterans is the finest in the world. Toward that goal, during the last three years, I have supported and signed legislation to expand and improve the treatment of all veterans who need to receive care from the Veterans Administration. Clearly, much more remains to be done for our veterans, and it is essential that we direct additional funds to those most in need.

What is not essential, and what does not further our goal of directly helping sick and disabled veterans, is spending a large sum of money to give VA physicians currently earning an average of \$55,000 a year up to 38 percent bonuses, making them by far the highest paid medical personnel in the entire government. Indeed, so generous are the bonuses provided in this bill that mid-career VA physicians could earn 30 percent more (\$76,200 versus \$58,700) than the maximum authorized annual salary for Armed Forces physicians. The Defense Department has recommended a veto of this bill because this differential in pay may adversely affect its ability to solve the current physician recruitment and retention problems in the military.

I am concerned about attracting and retaining excellent VA physicians. But the current salary and benefits are more than sufficient to do that. At the same time, the current level of health care is not, in all areas, sufficient. Therefore, rather than spend \$80 million on unneeded bonuses for a relatively few physicians, I would prefer that the Congress target funds more directly on improving health care benefits and treatment for veterans.

I therefore urge the Congress to pass a bill which meets the other goals of H.R. 7102, including the Veterans Administration real and specific needs for certain physician specialists, while providing—from the money that would have been projected for excessive bonuses—for improved health care treatment of veterans.

JIMMY CARTER.

THE WHITE HOUSE, August 22, 1980.