

VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE REPORT, SEPT, 2019

by
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1. As of this writing, there are now 59 cosponsors for H. R. 96, that would require the VA to treat dental care the same as other medical specialties. With one exception (Cong. Reed, NY), all of the cosponsors for H. R. 4556 (predecessor bill in the previous congress) who are still in congress, have signed on to the new bill. We still need more cosponsors, so do whatever you can.

2. The Cook County Board passed a resolution in support of H. R. 96 on July 25. I was given an official copy in a 9.5" x 15" folder. The wording was far better than expected, making it clear that they spent time and effort on the issue.

3. On July 29, Bruce Parry and I met with Shannon Stone-Winding of DePaul's Veterans Advocacy group at DePaul's downtown campus to discuss plans for a partnership with DePaul's veterans that would give us interns.

We completed a long form to indicate our needs, and I later signed an agreement on the part of CVO to work with them.

We will have a meeting at DePaul when they are ready for us, probably in the first week of Oct.

4. Acting IDVA Dir. Linda Chapa LaVia spoke at the VU meeting on Aug. 3, and Mark Weiman spoke about dental care for veterans. She is supporting us in our efforts to get H. R. 96 passed.

She liked the Cook County Board resolution and suggested that we get a similar joint resolution from the IL General Assembly. She suggested that I contact State Sen. Antonio Munoz and State Reps. Stephanie Kifowit and Daniel Swanson, and I followed up on that. Kifowit is taking the lead on this, and it's in the mill.

5. The State still hasn't published the new Illinois Handbook of Government but the Illinois Blue Book is now available. This is a hard-cover expensive book, so I can not order it in quantity. It is a great source of information, so I urge everyone to order one from the Secy. of State. It's free.

As for the Illinois Handbook of Government, it will be released a year later, just like the last one. This does not make any sense, because there will only be a few months before the new officials are sworn in. Common sense would dictate that both should be released as soon as the information is available, like now. I will keep checking, and when the book is out, I will order a bunch to pass out. Your tax dollars at work

6. On Aug. 12, I attended the Town Haul meeting at JBVAMC. In attendance were Dr. Mehta from VISN-12, VARO Dir. Hughes Turner, JBVAMC Deputy Dir. Lori Lohar (Dir. Marc Magill was unavailable.), Chief of Staff Sarah Unterman, and others. No congressional staffers were present.

The meeting was ruined by, as far too many vet meetings, those who wanted to talk about their personal problems and inconsequential griping. To make matters worse, two vets in particular monopolized the meeting with things like their perception of a lack of respect by hospital personnel, etc. They were, in the opinion of many, mentally ill. The meeting started with Turner speaking about claims and dependent benefits, but he kept being interrupted by a guy sitting directly in front of him; fortunately, the vet did not stick around for the whole meeting.

Among items discussed were: For future Town Haul meetings, you can get your parking ticket validated at the desk as you walk in the hospital. If a dependent, or anyone else, visits an inpatient, he must pay for parking, which isn't cheap. Shuttles to other VA medical facilities are for those with appointments; the schedules for the shuttles are posted by the door and other places. One vet complained that the computer room is not always open when it should be and that the printer has not been working for several months; the problem is that the room is staffed by

volunteers, but the staff will look into having a staff member to oversee the operation; they claimed ignorance of the inoperable printer. The vet said that the computers are essential for working on claims and other important things.

I later went to the computer room to do email, etc. During that time, a shooter entered the Taylor St. entrance, and was apprehended by a quick response by the VA police. Clinics were ordered to evacuate and move to the first floor, where we were held in place, where nobody could leave or enter the hospital, for over an hour. There were numerous police from the VA, Chicago PD, SWAT, and FBI. Firearms, whether "assault rifles" or others, are prohibited at JBVAMC.

7. Cong. Lauren Underwood introduced H. R. 3932, that would end co-pays. Sen. Tammy Duckworth introduced a corresponding senate bill, S. 1573. Contact your congressman to ask that he sign on as a cosponsor.

8. Mark Weiman spoke with Cong. John Shimkus over the phone and with Cong. Darin LaHood in person, but we still have no Republican cosponsors.

9. Francine O'Connor attended a Town Hall Meeting for vets in Elburn, IL, for the purpose of publicly asking Cong. Lauren Underwood to cosponsor H. R. 96. Francine and I have supplied information to her staffer in DC, and Francine has twice visited her West Chicago office. Underwood's support is critical, because she is not only on the Veterans Affairs Cmte., but she is also on the Subcommittee for Health, where H. R. 96 will first be considered, but not until the end of the year. It must be noted that Underwood's predecessor, Republican Randy Hultgren, was one of the first cosponsors of the previous bill, without us having even asked him to do so, and he was interviewed by WFLD's Natalie Bomke in support of the bill.

At the Elburn meeting, Francine spoke with State Rep. Stephanie Kifowit, who said that she was working on our resolution.