

VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE REPORT, JAN, 2020

by

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1. As of this writing, there are now 68 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. It says that there are 68 Dems and 0 Repubs, but Cong. Jefferson Van Drew, who was a dentist prior to Congress, switched parties after he had cosponsored, so it's actually 67-1.

2. State Rep. Stephanie Kifowit, a Marine vet, introduced HRJ 84 on 9-17-19, a resolution urging the IL Congressional Delegation to cosponsor/support HR 96. This is patterned after the resolution passed by the Cook County Board. I had asked her to do this, at the direction of Acting IDVA Dir. Linda Chapa LaVia. Please contact your State Rep./Senator to request that they cosponsor this. It is currently in the Rules Committee, but it should be addressed in Jan. I am personally in contact with Kifowit on this. No further action yet.

3. The VA issued a proposal in the Federal Register on Dec. 13, 2019, that acknowledges the need for and importance of dental care. It wants to set up a pilot program in the major cities (where there are more dentists), whereby vets would get free or discounted treatment through the Mission Act. Anyone could have submitted comments up to Jan. 13, 2020, and we thank those who did. Numbers count (pardon the pun). Congress is supposed to act on it by 14 of their "days," but there's no telling exactly how long that will be. This is new territory for us.

4. We had hoped to get interns who would contact the congressmen from the other states, but so far, we still have no interns. On many occasions, Connie Edwards, a founding member of CVO, has stated that when CVO was founded, that the idea was that the member organizations would work on common problems/issues. Therefore, I am suggesting that each group volunteer to take on a state. I am asking that the groups willing to do this contact me with their first, second, and third choices for states, so that if another group already has your first choice, that you can get the second choice, and if that's already taken, then hopefully, you can get your third choice.

5. We were contacted by a vet from NH whose infected teeth were so bad, that he was draining the infection with a pin. I referred him to Patricia Devore of Vet Smiles, but since his situation seemed so bad, I felt that this was a potential suicide, so I contact our Suicide Prevention Team, and they contacted their counterparts in NH. Perhaps we saved a life.

6. Cong. Julia Brownley's (who initiated H. R. 96) office is still waiting for the VA's study that should have been completed by the end of Dec. I asked if the VA's proposal in the Federal Register was that study, but they said that it was not. Because we wanted to insure that the VA would acknowledge the importance of dental care, we were very interested in getting to those who would author the study, but since we now know that the VA is on our side on this one, we need not fear.

7. Regarding H. R. 3932/S. 1573, that would eliminate copays for preventive treatment, there has been no action. The House version has 34 cosponsors, none from IL, although Lauren Underwood was the originator. The Senate version, introduced by Tammy Duckworth, has only 1 cosponsor.

8. JBVAMC still has no Director, and the acting Director just left. There was a Town Haul meeting scheduled for Monday, Feb. 3. It will still probably be held, but we won't know for sure until a meeting notice/flyer is disseminated. I have a dental appointment for that day, so I can't attend. Will someone please go to represent CVO and take some notes. Please notify me if you will attend.

9. H. R. 3495/S. 1906 would increase spending for suicide prevention programs. The House version has 251 cosponsors, 9 of which are from IL (Kinzinger, Bost, Rodney Davis, Shimkus, LaHood, Rush, Schneider, Kelly). There would have been 254 cosponsors, but 3 withdrew for unspecified reasons. The Senate version has 28 cosponsors, none from IL.