

VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE REPORT, MAY, 2020

by

Larry E. Nazimek

1. As of this writing, there are now 70 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. There are 69 Dems and 1 Repub, with that 1 Repub. being Cong. Jefferson Van Drew, who was a dentist prior to Congress, who had switched parties after he had cosponsored.

2. At our Feb. meeting, member organizations that were present volunteered to work on the congressional delegations of the states they selected, but so far, we have not had any new cosponsors from those states or any others (Harold Washington American Legion: MN, NWVU: IN, Veterans for Peace: HI, Blue Star Platoon: WI, Vet Tech US: MI). We can still contact congressional staffers, even though there is the COVID-19 pandemic.

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 out of committee, so we will have to wait for it to get on the schedule for a vote. It was unanimously approved by the Veterans Affairs Committee.

State reps can not, at this time, cosponsor anything, because they must go to a "Journal Room" in Springfield that is currently closed. You can still ask them to cosponsor once they return to Springfield later this month.

3..Regarding H. R. 3932/S. 1573, that would eliminate copays for preventive treatment, there has been no action. The House version has 36 cosponsors, with only 1 cosponsor from IL, Jesus Garcia (my congressman), although Lauren Underwood was the originator. The Senate version, introduced by Tammy Duckworth, has only 1 cosponsor. Please ask your congressmen to co-sponsor it.

4. Underwood/Duckworth just introduced H. R. 6845/S. 3724, a bill to prohibit the Secretary of Veterans Affairs from charging veterans copayments for preventive services relating to COVID-19. They are similar to H. R. 3932/S 1573, in that they are concerned with eliminating VA copays for preventive care, but they are all in need of cosponsors, so please get co-sponsors.

5. I will be on the America's Heroes Group radio program, Saturday, May 30, at 1600, to discuss H. R. 3932/S. 1573. Their producer is very adamant that congress is not supporting this bill, saying that since there is an important national election coming up, that we should hold our congressmen accountable.

6. State Rep. Joyce Mason, of Gurnee, introduced H. R. 4903, a Veterans Bill of Rights, that provides for several things (too long to mention) for vets. She also introduced H. B. 4944 that would consider vets with less than honorable administrative discharges the same as those with Honorable Discharges when it comes to State programs.

She is very interested in helping vets, and when the restrictions are lifted, I will meet with her to discuss them. If you have any ideas for legislation (besides getting vets dental care through the dental schools) that you would like me to bring up, let me know.

7. Regarding the VA's dental pilot program that was introduced in the Federal Register on Dec. 13, we are still waiting for an update. We called their voice mail and emailed them, but have not heard back.

8. We emailed Joe Mantegna and Montel Williams to ask for their support in getting co-sponsors for H. R. 96 but have not received any replies.

9. Regarding Aspen Dental's annual Day of Service, no decision has been made yet as to whether it will take place this year, although they doubt it. As for their Mouth Mobile, everything is on hold due to the pandemic.

10. We wrote to Dr. Chad Gehani, the President of the American Dental Assn., with the hope of getting their support for H. R. 96, but he replied, saying that they will not get involved, although he passed our request to another department, so there is still some hope.

11. The VA had a podcast that you have heard about, if you get the VA News emails. I suggested that they do a podcast about the importance of dental care and H. R. 96, but I was told that they can't get into advocacy. They were interested in interviewing Mark Weiman, allowing him to slip in information on H. R. 96, but they changed their minds. They may do a short PSA on dental care, and upon their request, I gave them some information.

12. The JBVAMC Stakeholders teleconference meeting scheduled for May 13 was rescheduled for May 21. I will represent CVO. It is an honor for us to be invited to "sit at the table," since this includes reps of senators/congressmen, VSOs, and department heads.

13. I emailed Eleanor Goldberg, a writer with the Huffington Post, who, in 2015, wrote an article about Aspen Dental's Day of Service for veterans and the need for dental care for vets, to ask her to write an article about H. R. 96.

14. I wrote to the Check Your 6 organization to ask for their support for H. R. 96, because they previously worked with Aspen Dental to get services for some vets. They have a lot of media people in their group, so their help would be vital in spreading the word and getting co-sponsors.