

VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE REPORT, MARCH, 2019

by
Larry E. Nazimek

1. As of this writing, there are now 43 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. California has finally overtaken Illinois as the state with the most cosponsors.

2. The Chicago Wolves will be having their annual Salute to Military Families Night on Saturday, March 30, which will include an expo prior to the game. Tickets and parking are free, but the Village of Rosemont charges a \$3 fee/ticket.

<https://www.chicagowolves.com/veterans/salute-to-military-families-night/#>

3. On March 4, I attended a Town Haul meeting at JBVAMC. Representatives of various VA departments set up tables at the side of the meeting room, and all JBVAMC officials were present. As for vets, however, the attendance was sparse, because there were no posters or signs displayed. Emails were sent out, and there were flyers on the Veteran Strike Force table, but outside of that, vets were unaware of the meeting.

VARO Director Hughes Turner said that appeals would be heard within 125 days, and those who took their cases to the VBA, would have their cases heard within one year.

Turner and Hospital Director Marc Magill were be guests on the America's Heroes Group program on WVON, Saturday, March 9, 1600-1700.

I asked for updates on having applications for the new Veteran ID cards processed here, the City Key ID Card, and WiFi for JBVAMC. They haven't heard anything further on the Veteran ID Cards, and they are not following up on it, so the issue is dead (unless many vets ask the VA HQ about it). As for the City Key ID Cards, they acted as though they knew nothing about it, although I have been asking about it for quite a while. I was told to email Marilyn Muhammad with the info, so I did.

As for the WiFi, it isn't happening, although I feel that we should keep asking for it. (I can't ask for it, because I already did, but if you were not at the meeting, then you should bring it up at future meetings.)

The next Town Haul meeting at JBVAMC will be in May, although they did not have a firm date yet.

4. On March 2, Mark Weiman and Dr. Larry Zager, an oral surgeon, were guests on the America's Heroes Group program on WVON.

5. I saw Alderman Gilbert Villegas on Monday, March 11, during his Ward Night (when people can speak with aldermen in his office without an appointment). Villegas is the Chmn. of the City Council's Veterans Caucus.

I spoke to him about our efforts to get dental care for veterans and how we needed cosponsors for H. R. 96. I asked if the City Council could pass a resolution, asking the IL Congressional Delegation to cosponsor and support H. R. 96. He told me to draft the resolution ASAP, so that he could introduce it at the City Council meeting on Wednesday. I drafted the resolution that evening, and after being revised, it passed the City Council with flying colors.

I asked if the City Council could do anything to get free, or at least discounted, care at the UIC Dental School, but he said that it was a state matter, so nothing could be done.

I asked if anything could be done to get us care through the County Care program. (This health care program covers Cook County residents, including the undocumented, whose assets are less than \$2,000.) A new large clinic, that will have dental care, is being constructed at Hanson Park, located in the district of Commissioner Luis Arroyo, Jr., a friend of Villegas. He immediately called Arroyo to ask if the program could cover the dental needs of veterans, and Arroyo will look into it. I was told that we should get an answer in a few days. (Nothing ventured, nothing gained.)

I suggested that the City maintain a database of Chicago vets. Vets could be asked for their contact information when they get their City Key ID Cards, although when I suggested this to the City Clerk's Office a long time ago, I was told that there would be no databases associated with the Card, because the original purpose for the Card was to provide the undocumented with a government-issued ID, and these people would be reluctant to get the Card if their information would go into a database. With such a database for vets, the City could notify vets of events, good deals, and other information. A perfect example of the need for this is the announcement that vets will no longer have to pay for the City stickers for their cars, something that relatively few vets currently know about. He said that Victor LaGroom, who had been in charge of the City's Veterans Affairs Office, quit and moved to California some seven months ago, and the City is taking too long to hire a replacement. We will wait for a replacement to be hired.

I suggested that there should be an event, where the City Clerk's mobile processing equipment for the Card would be set up to serve vets and not the general public. Currently, the lines for the Card are very long, as the undocumented make an effort to get them. He said that this should not be a problem, and that he will set something up for his adjoining office. The Card is free for vets, and VETERAN is put on the card.