

VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE REPORT, FEB, 2020

by

Larry E. Nazimek

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 67 Dems and 1 Repub, because Cong. Jefferson Van Drew, who was a dentist prior to Congress, switched parties after he had cosponsored.

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.

3. The VA issued a proposal in the Federal Register on Dec. 13, 2019, that acknowledged the need for and importance of dental care. It wants to set up a pilot program (in VISN 12 and 3 others) in major cities (where there are more dentists), whereby vets would get free or discounted treatment through the Mission Act. It appears to depend on dentists who will work for little or nothing, so it is anyone's guess as to exactly what it will provide.

It passed the House and Senate unanimously and is awaiting the President's signature. Until it is signed, it is merely a piece of paper, so please be patient. Once it becomes law, there will, in all probability, be a statement issued by the VA that will provide more information, and after that, it will probably take time to be implemented. Once it becomes law, we can ask about it at the Town Haul Meetings at our hospitals.

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. The American Dental Assn. Will hold its annual Mid-Winter Meeting at McCormick Place, Feb. 20-22, 2020. People from all over the world will be there. We have been given a free booth, where we will draw attention to our fight to get H. R. 96 passed, with the intention of getting more dentists involved in this fight. Hopefully, they will help get more cosponsors.

6. After HJR 80 is signed, I will ask Cong. Julia Brownley's (who initiated H. R. 96) office for an update on H. R. 96. The VA study that they were waiting for has been completed, although I have not been successful in getting a copy of it. Unfortunately, the staffer who was very receptive to us is no longer there.

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. Please ask your congressmen to cosponsor it.

8. Christine Kleckner is the JBVAMC Acting Dir. I attended the Town Haul meeting on Monday, Feb. 3 and already reported on it. She changed the quarterly Stakeholders Meetings to monthly, on the second Wednesdays, as if we didn't already have enough meetings to fulfill our need for meetings.