

Coalition of Veterans Organizations

CVO



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VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE REPORT

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by

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For pending legislation, I will keep what was in the previous report, but changes will be in boldface.

1. H. R. 914 has 52 co-sponsors, of which 3 are Republicans, including Jefferson Van Drew and Paul Gosar, who were dentists in their prior lives. 11 co-sponsors are from IL, while CA and NY, the next nearest, have 5 each. The IL congressmen we still need are Foster, Schneider, and all 5 Republicans.

Our efforts to get interns or volunteers to work on getting co-sponsors have been unsuccessful.

If anyone has any ideas, please speak up.

2. Sen. Bernie Sanders introduced S. 3017, Veterans Dental Care Eligibility Expansion and Enhancement Act, on 10-20-21. It only has 8 co-sponsors, 5 of which are the original ones. Please work on this bill, too. Our responses from our two senators have been a disappointment.

3. We did a lot better getting co-sponsors on H. R. 96 (dental bill in 116th Congress) than H. R. 914, which is surprising, because we were counting on those who co-sponsored the previous bill to do the same here. If every member of every one of our organizations, plus every one of our individual members, were to take even 5 congressmen/senators to work on, we would be doing a lot better. If any member or organization is willing to work on this, please contact me, so that we can coordinate who you will work on. I can provide the type of letters that I use, so you can either use them or write your own. It's a matter of calling their DC office, asking for the email address of the staffer who handles veterans issues, emailing that person, and, if no response, following up in 2 weeks. Simply writing a single letter is not enough, based on our experience. We have learned that for some staffers, if you have a yahoo, gmail, hotmail, etc. email address, that it automatically goes into their spam folders. Without a lot more co-sponsors, these bills will die in committee.

4. S. 1779/H. R. 3452: Veterans Preventive Health Coverage Fairness Act. The Senate bill was introduced by Duckworth and co-sponsored by Durbin and 4 others. The House version was introduced by Underwood and has 30 co-sponsors, including, from IL, Garcia and Newman. This bill eliminates veterans' co-payments for medication, hospital care, and medical services related to preventive health services provided by the VA.

5. H. R. 617/S. 399: No Coronavirus Co-pays for Veterans Act, was introduced by Underwood, with only 3 co-sponsors, none from IL. S. 399, introduced by Duckworth, with only 1 co-sponsor, is the senate version of the same bill. Civilian insurance policies do not charge for these treatments, so it is not fair that Veterans should be charged for it. From first hand experience, if you are treated for COVID-19, you will be charged \$50 if you are required to make copays.

6. H. R. 845, VA Billing Accountability Act, protects vets from VA billing errors or charges posted over 180 days from the treatment. There are 20 co-sponsors, all Republican, with Rodney Davis as the only one from IL.

7. H. R. 5721, VA Infrastructure Powers Exceptional Research Act of 2021, has 6 co-sponsors, with Mike Bost the only one from IL.

8. Sen. Bernie Sanders introduced S. 3020, Veterans State Eligibility Standardization Act, which eliminates the differences in copay thresholds from county to county. It has no co-sponsors.

9. S. 3854/H. R. 6823: Elizabeth Dole Home and Community Based Services for Veterans and Caregivers Act of 2022. The Senate bill has **15** co-sponsors (none from IL), and the House bill has **44** (Underwood **and Schakowsky are the only ones** from IL).

10. H. R. 7524: ACES Act. It has **23** co-sponsors, none from IL. It will provide for additional investigation to determine the extent that aircrews of fighter aircraft and ground crews have a greater incidence of various cancers and to identify which ones. Earlier data shows this to be the case. It will be similar to studies that have determined the problems with the Burn Pits.

11. H.R.3950: Veterans Medical Legal Partnerships Act of 2021. From the bill's text: "To amend the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 to authorize a State veterans assistance program, and for other purposes." The summary has not yet been posted. It has **3** co-sponsors, none from IL. This is a perfect example of an amendment being attached to a bill of an entirely different subject.

12. In Dec. 2019, the VA's Innovation Office introduced a pilot program for dental care in the Federal Register. The program was to be implemented in VISNs 2, 8, 10, 12. The program was unanimously passed by Congress under HJR 80, and signed by the President in March, 2020.

It has been introduced in NY/NJ under the "VETSmile" program, and is now in several states, but not in VISNs 8, 10, or 12.

I contacted Bailee Bannon, our POC on the program, and she said that they could not find dentists in our area who would work for free. We are, however, still pursuing this.

13. At my suggestion, Annaliese Cothron, Exec. Dir. of the American Inst. For Dental Public Health, was a guest on the America's Heroes Group radio program on WVON. They were so impressed with her, that she will be a monthly guest on the program. I will put out the word when she is on the program. The American Heroes Group program is broadcast on WVON, Saturdays, 1600-1800, with 4 segments. If you miss the program on the radio, you can still access it on facebook. In addition, on Tuesdays, the 4 segments are each available as podcasts on the AHG website, so when Annaliese is a guest, I will spam out her segment.

14. Francine O'Connor attended a meeting on Oct. 11, where she spoke with Cong. Quigley and his staffer, Adam Winters (who once spoke at one of our meetings) about the dental pilot program and other issues.

15. On Sept. 26, I emailed State Sen. Craig Wilcox, suggesting that he introduce a bill that would give veterans free, or at least discounted, care at the dental schools of UIC and SIU. He is a 24 year Air Force vet, and while he represents McHenry, he attended a recent VACCC zoom meeting. His office immediately replied that he has been in discussions concerning dental care and supports us.

16. On Oct. 12, I wrote to the IDVA, asking them to propose the same type of program as above.

17. On Sept. 27, I emailed to those on the VACCC list, asking them to have their organizations try to get more co-sponsors for H. R. 914/S. 3017. I got a few replies that supported this.