

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY MAY 5, 2004

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE—2003–04 REGULAR SESSION

Assembly Joint Resolution

No. 71

Introduced by Assembly Member Wolk

(~~Coauthor: Assembly Member Parra~~)

**(Coauthors: Assembly Members Dutton, Kehoe, Matthews,
Mountjoy, Nakano, Parra, Runner, Salinas, Wiggins, and Wyland)**

March 23, 2004

Assembly Joint Resolution No. 71—Relative to veterans health care.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AJR 71, as amended, Wolk. Veterans health care.

This measure would request the President and Congress of the United States to enact appropriate legislation to provide a guaranteed level of funding for veterans health care, and to restore medical benefits eligibility for veterans in Priority Group 8. This measure would also urge the Department of Veterans Affairs to seek out eligible veterans to provide them with benefits information.

Fiscal committee: no.

- 1 WHEREAS, The level of funding for the federal Department of
- 2 Veterans Affairs (VA) health care under the annual federal budget
- 3 is within the discretion of Congress; and
- 4 WHEREAS, Section 1710(a) of Title 38 of the United States
- 5 Code provides that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs “shall”
- 6 furnish hospital care and medical services, but only to the extent
- 7 Congress has provided money to cover the costs of care; and

1 WHEREAS, Federal law charges the VA with a duty to seek out
2 eligible veterans and their family members, and to provide them
3 with information and assistance to ensure that they apply for all
4 available VA benefits and services; and

5 WHEREAS, Veterans have earned the right to VA medical care
6 through their extraordinary sacrifices and service to this Nation;
7 and

8 WHEREAS, Veterans enrolling in the medical benefits package
9 are classified in enrollment priority groups, with Priority Group 1
10 having the highest priority and Priority Group 8 having the lowest
11 priority; and

12 WHEREAS, The cumulative effects of continuing shortfalls in
13 health care funding and the lack of outreach to advise veterans of
14 the health care resources to which they may be entitled has now
15 resulted in the rationing of health care, including the suspension
16 of new enrollment of veterans assigned to Priority Group 8 and
17 curtailed enrollment to many other veterans; and

18 WHEREAS, Veterans in Priority Group 8 include many seniors
19 who are residents of California and are unable to afford medical
20 care, mentally ill, or homeless, and unaware of their rights as
21 veterans; and

22 WHEREAS, When veterans cannot get needed health care
23 services from the VA when they go elsewhere, shifting the cost of
24 care to state welfare and Medicaid programs or other safety net
25 hospitals where society pays more and the patient suffers; and

26 WHEREAS, The Veterans Health Administration is the most
27 efficient and cost-effective health care system, providing care for
28 25 percent to 30 percent less than comparable Medicare services;
29 and

30 WHEREAS, Even though the VA serves a population of
31 veterans who are older, sicker, and have a higher prevalence of
32 mental and behavior health problems, it does so at well below
33 Medicare rates; and

34 WHEREAS, Many veterans need and depend on the VA health
35 care system and its specialized services concerning prosthetics,
36 posttraumatic stress disorder, spinal cord injury, and blind
37 rehabilitation to treat their service-connected disabilities and meet
38 their unique health care needs; and



1 WHEREAS, The proposed 2004–05 federal budget does not
2 provide the necessary funding to adequately provide health care to
3 all of our veterans; and

4 ~~WHEREAS, It is disingenuous for our government to promise~~
5 ~~health care to veterans, but then make it unattainable because of~~
6 ~~inadequate funding; and~~

7 WHEREAS, Making veterans’ health care mandatory would
8 ensure the government meets its obligation to provide timely,
9 quality health care to all veterans eligible for care in the VA health
10 care system; now therefore, be it

11 *Resolved by the Assembly and Senate of the State of California,*
12 *jointly,* That the Legislature respectfully urges the President and
13 Congress of the United States to amend Title 38 of the United
14 States Code to provide a guaranteed level of funding for veterans
15 health care and to require that medical benefits package eligibility
16 be restored for veterans in Priority Group 8; and be it further

17 *Resolved,* That the Legislature urges the federal Department of
18 Veterans Affairs to carry out its duties to seek out eligible veterans
19 and their family members, and to provide them with information
20 and assistance to ensure that they apply for all available VA
21 benefits and services, and be it further

22 *Resolved,* That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies
23 of this resolution to the President of the United States, the Senate
24 Majority and Minority Leaders of the United States Congress, the
25 Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Chairman of the
26 United States Committee on Veterans Affairs, each member of the
27 California Delegation to Congress, and to the author for
28 appropriate distribution.

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