

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY MAY 10, 2004

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY MAY 5, 2004

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE—2003–04 REGULAR SESSION

**Assembly Joint Resolution**

**No. 71**

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**Introduced by Assembly Member Wolk**

(Coauthors: Assembly Members Dutton, Kehoe, Matthews, Mountjoy, Nakano, Parra, Runner, Salinas, Wiggins, ~~and Wyland~~) *Wyland, Aghazarian, Bates, Benoit, Berg, Bermudez, Bogh, Calderon, Campbell, Canciamilla, Chan, Chavez, Chu, Cogdill, Cohn, Corbett, Correa, Cox, Daucher, Diaz, Dutra, Dymally, Firebaugh, Frommer, Garcia, Goldberg, Hancock, Harman, Jerome Horton, Shirley Horton, Houston, Jackson, Keene, Koretz, La Malfa, La Suer, Laird, Leno, Leslie, Levine, Lieber, Longville, Lowenthal, Maddox, Maldonado, Maze, McCarthy, Mullin, Nakanishi, Nation, Negrete McLeod, Nunez, Oropeza, Pacheco, Pavley, Plescia, Reyes, Richman, Ridley-Thomas, Samuelian, Simitian, Spitzer, Strickland, Vargas, and Yee*)

March 23, 2004

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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  
8 WHEREAS, Federal law charges the VA with a duty to seek out  
9 eligible veterans and their family members, and to provide them  
10 with information and assistance to ensure that they apply for all  
11 available VA benefits and services; and  
12 WHEREAS, Veterans have earned the right to VA medical care  
13 through their extraordinary sacrifices and service to this Nation;  
14 and  
15 WHEREAS, Veterans enrolling in the medical benefits package  
16 are classified in enrollment priority groups, with Priority Group 1  
17 having the highest priority and Priority Group 8 having the lowest  
18 priority; and  
19 WHEREAS, The cumulative effects of continuing shortfalls in  
20 health care funding and the lack of outreach to advise veterans of  
21 the health care resources to which they may be entitled has now  
22 resulted in the rationing of health care, including the suspension  
23 of new enrollment of veterans assigned to Priority Group 8 and  
24 curtailed enrollment to many other veterans; and  
25 WHEREAS, Veterans in Priority Group 8 include many seniors  
26 who are residents of California and are unable to afford medical  
27 care, mentally ill, or homeless, and unaware of their rights as  
28 veterans; and  
29 WHEREAS, When veterans cannot get needed health care  
30 services from the VA when they go elsewhere, shifting the cost of  
31 care to state welfare and Medicaid programs or other safety net  
32 hospitals where society pays more and the patient suffers; and  
33 WHEREAS, The Veterans Health Administration is the most  
34 efficient and cost-effective health care system, providing care for  
35 25 percent to 30 percent less than comparable Medicare services;  
36 and



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

5 WHEREAS, Many veterans need and depend on the VA health  
6 care system and its specialized services concerning prosthetics,  
7 posttraumatic stress disorder, spinal cord injury, and blind  
8 rehabilitation to treat their service-connected disabilities and meet  
9 their unique health care needs; and

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

13 WHEREAS, Making veterans’ health care mandatory would  
14 ensure the government meets its obligation to provide timely,  
15 quality health care to all veterans eligible for care in the VA health  
16 care system; now, therefore, be it

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

23 *Resolved,* That the Legislature urges the federal Department of  
24 Veterans Affairs to carry out its duties to seek out eligible veterans  
25 and their family members, and to provide them with information  
26 and assistance to ensure that they apply for all available VA  
27 benefits and services; and be it further

28 *Resolved,* That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies  
29 of this resolution to the President of the United States, the Senate  
30 Majority and Minority Leaders of the United States Congress, the  
31 Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Chairman of the  
32 United States Committee on Veterans Affairs, each member of the  
33 California Delegation to Congress, and to the author for  
34 appropriate distribution.

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