

Assembly Joint Resolution No. 71

RESOLUTION CHAPTER 146

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

[Filed with Secretary of State August 17, 2004.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AJR 71, 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.

WHEREAS, The level of funding for the federal Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care under the annual federal budget is within the discretion of Congress; and

WHEREAS, Section 1710(a) of Title 38 of the United States Code provides that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs “shall” furnish hospital care and medical services, but only to the extent Congress has provided money to cover the costs of care; and

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

