

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SJM 8040

As Reported by House Committee On:

State Government

Brief Description: Requesting funding for veterans' health care needs.

Sponsors: Senators Shin, Jacobsen, Kastama, Thibaudeau, Berkey, Fraser, Doumit, Prentice, Horn, Kohl-Welles, Kline, Fairley, Oke, Stevens, Hale, Zarelli, T. Sheldon, B. Sheldon, Schmidt, McAuliffe, Keiser, Murray, Spanel, Brown, Eide, Rasmussen, Winsley and Benton.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government: 2/26/04 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Petitions the President of the United States, the Congress of the United States, and the Secretary of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs to serve adequately the current and future demands of our state's veterans and to affirm the debt owed these veterans.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Haigh, Chair; Miloscia, Vice Chair; Armstrong, Ranking Minority Member; Shabro, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Hunt, McDermott, Nixon, Tom and Wallace.

Staff: Marsha Reilly (786-7135).

Background:

In June 2002, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that the second phase of Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) project was underway. This process was designed as a way to identify the health care needs of veterans over the next 20 years and, once completed, will give VA a national plan for directing resources where they are most needed.

The VA concluded that it could enhance veterans health care benefits if reduced the

level of resources spent on underused, inefficient, or obsolete buildings and reinvested these savings to provide health care more efficiently in modern facilities at existing locations or new locations closer to where the veterans live.

The veteran population in Washington numbers about 670,000. The number of veterans receiving health care through the United States Department of Veterans Affairs ranks second to last among the states. The network for veterans' service provision that includes Washington has the largest number of veterans waiting for non-emergent clinic visits. Increasingly, numbers of Washington veterans who had previously had other arrangements for their health care must for the first time now turn to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs for their primary health care.

Summary of Bill:

The Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Washington petition President Bush, the Congress of the United States, and the Secretary of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs to serve adequately the current and future demands of our state's veterans and to affirm the debt owed these veterans.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Testimony For: There are 670,000 veterans in our state and Washington state is twelfth highest in the nation in numbers, yet the state is second from the bottom in receipt of benefits. This memorial urges Congress to give Washington state fair and adequate service for our veterans. This issue affects not only our veterans, but every tax-paying citizen of the state. Federal income taxes paid by citizens of Washington take care of veterans in other states. Within the Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 20, there are about 1.2 million veterans, 670,000 of which are in Washington state. Washington veterans are receiving care in disproportionately low numbers when compared to the rest of the country and when compared to the rest of VISN 20. The inequities are visible. The Vietnam veterans are now approaching an age where access to health care is needed, yet there is no access. There needs to be a unified effort by the Washington Congressional delegation to get benefits for Washington veterans.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Shin, prime sponsor; and John King, Washington Department of Veterans Affairs.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.