

Chiropractic VA Bill Sent to President for Signature

PRESIDENT BUSH EXPECTED TO SIGN BILL INTO LAW

Editorial Staff

On December 20, 2001, the day before the 107th Congress adjourned for a month hiatus, the U.S. Senate passed with unanimous consent and without amendment H.R. 3447, the Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care Programs Enhancement Act of 2001. The bill provides a program to recruit and retain qualified nurses within the Department of Veterans Affairs, and to "enhance certain health care programs," i.e., chiropractic (Sec. 204: Program for Provision of Chiropractic Care and Services to Veterans.)

As we go to press, the bill has gone to the president, and it's expected that he will sign it. Essentially, the president has 10 days to either sign a bill or veto it. Bills that are neither signed or vetoed within 10 days become law without the president's signature, except when Congress is adjourned during the 10-day period. This last scenario is deemed a "pocket veto."

The chiropractic section of H.R. 3447 is a compromise of the more sweeping bill the House passed. Here's the official wording of Sec. 204 of H.R.3447, the Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care Programs Enhancement Act of 2001:

- (a) REQUIREMENT FOR PROGRAM - Subject to the provisions of this section, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall carry out a program to provide chiropractic care and services to veterans through Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers and clinics.
- (b) ELIGIBLE VETERANS - Veterans eligible to receive chiropractic care and services under the program are veterans who are enrolled in the system of patient enrollment under section 1705 of title 38, United States Code.
- (c) LOCATION OF PROGRAM - The program shall be carried out at sites designated by the Secretary for purposes of the program. The Secretary shall designate at least one site for such program in each geographic service area of the Veterans Health Administration. The sites so designated shall be medical centers and clinics located in urban areas and in rural areas.
- (d) CARE AND SERVICES AVAILABLE - The chiropractic care and services available under the program shall include a variety of chiropractic care and services for neuromusculoskeletal conditions, including subluxation complex.
- (e) OTHER ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS -
- (1) The Secretary shall carry out the program through personal service contracts and by appointment of licensed chiropractors in Department medical centers and clinics.
 - (2) As part of the program, the Secretary shall provide training and materials relating to chiropractic care and services to Department health care providers assigned to primary care teams for the purpose of familiarizing such providers with the benefits of chiropractic care and services.
- (f) REGULATIONS- The Secretary shall prescribe regulations to carry out this section.
- (g) CHIROPRACTIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE-
- (1) The Secretary shall establish an advisory committee to provide direct assistance and advice to the Secretary in the development and implementation of the chiropractic health program.
 - (2) The membership of the advisory committee shall include members of the chiropractic care profession and such other members as the Secretary considers appropriate.
 - (3) Matters on which the advisory committee shall assist and advise the Secretary shall include the following:
 - (A) Protocols governing referral to chiropractors.
 - (B) Protocols governing direct access to chiropractic care.
 - (C) Protocols governing scope of practice of chiropractic practitioners.
 - (D) Definition of services to be provided.
 - (E) Such other matters the Secretary determines to be appropriate.
 - (4) The advisory committee shall cease to exist on December 31, 2004.

"The enactment of this historic legislation represents an enormous victory for America's veterans, who will now have access to the chiropractic care they have been denied for far too long," enthused ACA President Daryl Wills, DC.

"Historic" is accurate, as the first bill introduced to Congress to provide chiropractic services for veterans was, according to the International Chiropractors Association, drafted by ICA's founder and first president, B.J. Palmer in 1936.

Congress has mandated chiropractic within the VA health care system over the opposition of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and by various provider groups, including the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA).

"This tremendous win is also a sweet victory for the chiropractic profession, because we prevailed after our opponents tried to beat us down at every turn," added Dr. Wills.

"The enactment of this important legislation, with strong bi-partisan support, constitutes a major victory for the chiropractic profession and a legislative triumph over our opponents.

Joining the ACA in support of the legislation were the Association of Chiropractic Colleges, the International Chiropractors Association, and the World Chiropractic Alliance. The associations expressed their appreciation to all state chiropractic associations, individual doctors, and other chiropractic organizations that worked with them to help pass this landmark legislation, and to the players in Washington:

Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-SD) was cited by the chiropractic organizations for personally fighting for the passage of this legislation. The bill was championed by House Veterans Committee Chairman Christopher Smith (R-NJ) - the sponsor of the bill - along with Representatives Jerry Moran (R-KS); Lane Evans (D-IL); Bob Filner (D-CA); Senator Strom Thurmond (R-SC); and Senator Tim Hutchinson (R-AR). Governor Bob Wise of West Virginia was also instrumental in lobbying for support for the legislation

Assuming the bill becomes law, our national associations are poised to insure that the Department of Veterans Affairs follows the letter of the bill and fully implements the program as passed by Congress.

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