

ICA Instrumental in Getting Bill to House Floor

Editorial Staff

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After a year of careful planning and aggressive development of bipartisan support, legislation has been introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives to establish a permanent division of chiropractic services within the Veterans Health Administration, and the full-time employment of doctors of chiropractic as health professionals by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

House Resolution 4421, also known as the Veterans Chiropractic Care Act of 1998, was introduced on August 6th by Rep. Lane Evans of Illinois, the ranking Democrat on the House Committee on Veterans Affairs. Mr. Evans sponsored the legislation after working closely with the International Chiropractors Association to craft legislative language that would serve ICA's primary objective of establishing a chiropractic role in the VA.

In a statement to ICA, Rep. Evans provided the reasoning behind introduction of the legislation. "I believe veterans deserve the same freedom of choice of health care providers as enjoyed by citizens who receive health care benefits under Medicare, Medicaid, federal employee workers' compensation, all 50 state worker's compensation programs, and most federal employee health benefit plans," said Evans. "Passage of HR 4421 would provide a meaningful addition to federal health care programs for veterans who are currently in an unfair and isolated position as far as the availability of chiropractic services. It's time to correct this inequity."

"ICA believes that chiropractic should unite behind a drive to establish the principle of full-time employment of DCs by the VA," said Dr. Sid Williams, who chairs the legislative committee of the ICA. "We're going for the full-blown establishment of a permanent division of chiropractic, because the federal government is the largest employer of medical doctors in the country, and there is no reason whatsoever why DCs should not also have that status."

Congressman Evans, who has authored and co-sponsored more chiropractic legislation than any other sitting Congressional representative, was joined by 17 co sponsors (all Democrats but Rep. Leach) of the chiropractic veterans bill:

Neil Abercrombie (HI)

George Brown Jr. (CA)

Eni F.H. Faleomavaega (AS)

Bob Filner (CA)
Martin Frost (TX)
Virgil Goode Jr. (VA)
Luis Gutierrez (IL)
Paul Kanjorski (PA)
Joseph Kennedy (MA)
Patrick Kennedy (RI)
Dale Kildee (MI)
James Leach (IA)
Thomas Manton (NY)
Jim McDermott (WA)
Eleanor Holmes Norton (DC)
Charles Rangel (NY)
Bennie Thompson (MS)

HR 4421 is only the latest in a long succession of legislative initiatives seeking to include chiropractic services in federal veterans programs. The first legislation seeking to establish a chiropractic role in the VA was introduced in 1934 by a congressman concerned to see that veterans of World War I were able to receive chiropractic care. Over the years, ICA has offered many initiatives on behalf of chiropractic in the VA. The only "success" came a decade ago with the authorization of a demonstration project resulted in an "inconclusive study." The ICA asserts those results were a "reflection of the medical prejudices of the VA hierarchy rather than an objective measure of what chiropractic had contributed to the health and quality of life of those who had received chiropractic care."

Some friends in Congress and representatives of other chiropractic organizations have raised the possibility of seeking another demonstration project, because there appears to be a strong possibility of securing authority to conduct such a program in this congressional session. The ICA's position is that such a proposal is not in chiropractic's best interest: that it would only delay the objective of full chiropractic inclusion for many years; that chiropractic must fight for the parity with other providers that it deserves; that an immediate example of such a delay can be seen in the current military demonstration project being conducted through the U.S. Department of Defense.

Still, the military demonstration project has brought chiropractic care to thousands of military personnel and employed several dozen DCs as civilian contractors. The report from this project, many believe, will be very positive for chiropractic. The ICA, however, sees the project delaying for many more years the commissioning of DCs as officers in the U.S. Armed Forces.

ICA is nearing completion of a parallel VA initiative in the U.S. Senate, and will be working with a variety of chiropractic organizations, congressional friends and veteran groups to push this issue forward in the current Congress.

DCs are being encouraged, as always, to contact their representatives to cosponsor H.R. 4421. Chiropractic organizations will be monitoring the progress of the bill very closely. The bill will give us, at the very least, an objective measure of where members and candidates stand on chiropractic issues.

The ICA sees the "compelling logic of this bill and the fairness it embodies for DCs and veterans," and asserts the bill will be "an easy piece of legislation for members of Congress to support."

Editor's note: The ICA is offering a copy of the bill or a model letter to your member of Congress. You can the ICA at: tel. 703-528-5000 fax 703-528-5023 e-mail: chiro-chiropractic.org

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