

Michaud Holds Legislative Hearing on Veterans Health Care Bills

Monday, April 14 2008

WASHINGTON, DC - Today, Congressman Mike Michaud, Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health, held a legislative hearing on multiple bills within his subcommittee's jurisdiction.

WASHINGTON, DC - Today, Congressman Mike Michaud, Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health, held a legislative hearing on multiple bills within his subcommittee's jurisdiction. The hearing was an opportunity for Members of Congress, veteran service organizations, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and other interested stakeholders to provide their views and discuss recently-introduced legislation.

"The six bills before us cover a wide range of topics that are germane to veterans' health care," said Michaud. "Issues addressed in today's bills include Spina Bifida, epilepsy research centers, substance use disorder treatment and prevention, expansion of dental care, timely access to care, and a bill of rights. While I do not necessarily agree or disagree with these bills, I believe that this is an important part of the legislative process that will encourage frank discussions and new ideas."

One of the bills introduced today is H.R.5554, the Veterans Substance Use Disorders Prevention and Treatment Act of 2008, introduced by Chairman Michaud and Ranking Member Miller. This legislation will require the VA to provide the full continuum of care for substance use disorder, and it will require this full spectrum of care to be available at every VA medical center. It will also direct the VA to conduct a pilot program for internet-based substance use disorder treatment for veterans of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

"According to the VA, 48,661 Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans met the criteria for substance use disorder by January of 2008," said Michaud. "But this number only reflects veterans who have been seen by the VA, which means that the total number of veterans with substance use disorder is likely higher."

According to the November 2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, over 7 percent of veterans met the criteria for a past year substance use disorder, and approximately one-quarter of veterans age 18 to 25 met the criteria for a past year substance use disorder.

"Substance abuse can tear apart families and ruin lives," Michaud said. "We need to explore new ways to encourage our newest generation of heroes to seek help."

A list of the bills considered during the legislative hearing today can be found below.

HR 2818, Amends Title 38 to provide for the establishment of Epilepsy Centers of Excellence in the Veterans Health Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs; (Perlmutter D-CO-7)

- Directs the Secretary of VA to designate, establish, and operate at least six VA health-care facilities as locations for epilepsy centers of excellence.

- Requires the Under Secretary for Health of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) to establish a peer review panel to assess the scientific and clinical merit of proposals for the designation of such centers.

- Requires a VHA national coordinator for epilepsy programs to:

- o (1) supervise the operation of the centers;

- o (2) coordinate and support throughout the VA health-care system better access to diagnosis, research, care, and education for epilepsy and traumatic brain injury; and

- o (3) conduct regular evaluations of the centers.

HR 5554, Veterans Substance Use Disorders Prevention and Treatment Act of 2008; (Michaud D-ME-2)

- Requires the VA to provide the full continuum of care for substance use disorder, and it will require this full spectrum of care to be available at every VA medical center

- Directs the VA to conduct a pilot program for internet-based substance use disorder treatment for veterans of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

HR 5595, Make Our Veterans Smile Act of 2008; (Carney D-PA-10)

- Directs the Secretary of VA to provide dental coverage to any service-connected disabled veteran, regardless of disability rating.

HR 5622, Veterans Timely Access to Care Act; (Brown-Waite R-FL-5)

• Directs

the Secretary of VA to carry out a pilot program to ensure that the standard for access to care for a veteran seeking primary care from the VA 30 days from the date the veteran contacts the Department.

• Directs

the Secretary of VA to prescribe an appropriate standard for waiting times at Department health-care facilities as measured from the time a visit is scheduled until the time the veteran is seen.

HR 5729, Spina Bifida Health Care Program Expansion Act; (Ellsworth D-IN-8)

• Directs the Secretary of VA to provide a comprehensive health benefit to children of Vietnam veterans with Spina Bifida.

HR 5730, Injured and Amputee Veterans Bill of Rights; (Filner D-CA-51)

- Directs the Secretary of VA to display in each prosthetic and orthotic clinic of the VA an Injured and Amputee Veterans.