

For Immediate Release: Jan 22, 2010
Contact: Haven Kerchner, 704-786-1612
Haven.kerchner@mail.house.gov

This Week in Washington

We hear a lot about the people not having a role in their government. There is a feeling that laws aren't written with the average person in mind.

I want to share the stories behind three pieces of legislation I have or will introduce in the coming weeks. Each one of these bills was born out of ideas presented by constituents right here at home. I am proud to introduce the legislation and even prouder to represent the folks who brought these issues to my attention.

The first bill would have an impact on veterans across this country. My staff and I were contacted by a 100 percent permanently disabled American veteran who voiced his concerns about the vast difference in benefits offered by states to 100 percent permanently disabled veterans. While some states provide a very robust package of benefits, demonstrating its commitment and appreciation for its disabled veterans, other states' benefits packages are lacking in comparison.

The most bothersome is that despite North Carolina's large veteran population, our state's benefit package is far from what our veterans deserve. Our veterans have answered our nation's call for duty and served this country with honor and distinction. They deserve the very best benefit package we can offer.

After hearing this concern, I am sponsoring a bill to create a commission to review each state's current disabled veterans benefits package, compare the packages and rank each state based on the benefits it offers to 100 percent permanently disabled veterans. This commission will provide recommendations to Congress and each state on how to make each state's package comparable across the country.

The second bill came about when a constituent visited our office to voice her concerns about lymphedema and the denial of coverage for treatment of this devastating disease. Her son suffers from the disease, and she had fought to see that he receives the treatment he needs.

Lymphedema is a chronic disease caused by a weakened lymphatic system, and can be hereditary or caused by a secondary reason such as injury to the lymph nodes. Many cancer patients suffer from lymphedema which causes lymphatic fluid to collect in the limbs and cause swelling. The swelling can become permanent if not treated.

Yet, coverage for treatment is routinely denied by insurance companies as well as Medicare and Medicaid. Complications from the disease if left untreated can range from severe deformity, disability, pain and can even lead to death. Luckily, treatment is covered for breast cancer patients under the Women's Health and Cancer Act, but others suffering from the disease fight an uphill battle just to get coverage for treatment.

continued

Press Release

Our constituent has already worked with the state to mandate insurance companies to provide coverage for lymphedema treatment in North Carolina with the help of Representative Tricia Cotham, but her concern is the thousands of people across the country that fight on a daily basis to get their insurance companies to cover this badly-needed treatment. States which have mandated the coverage have proven that covering the treatment leads to lower medical expenses caused by complications of the disease.

We must right that wrong, and make sure that people living with this disease are granted access to the treatments they need. We hope to introduce this important legislation to mandate coverage for lymphedema treatment in the coming weeks.

The third piece of legislation came straight from a couple in Stanly County. This couple trains service dogs, and they wanted to voice their concerns about allowing service dogs in training access to the areas where normally only service dogs at work would be allowed. This would allow service dogs to receive the best training in the areas where they will actually be working.

Service dogs provide invaluable help to those they serve, allowing individuals freedoms that their disability might not afford them otherwise. It is critical that these animals receive the best training in any and all areas they will go while working.

I introduced H.R. 4378 which would amend the Americans with Disabilities Act to require that the access to transportation and public accommodations be afforded to trainers and handlers of service animals as is afforded under the ADA to individuals with disabilities who use such service animals. This gives the trainers and handlers the ability to better train and prepares service dogs for their future uses.

These extraordinary folks saw a need and petitioned their government and I am doing all I can to make sure that their idea becomes law. Their causes aren't just about what they need, but about helping thousands of others who are living with the same problem or facing the same challenges.

I am making sure their voices and yours are heard in Washington.