

Statement of Rep. Greg Steube (R-FL-17)
House Veterans Affairs Committee
May 25, 2021
Member Day Hearing

Thank you, Chairman Takano, Ranking Member Bost, and members of this Committee for giving me an opportunity to discuss a matter of importance.

As you already know, a large amount of VA third-party health billings goes uncollected each year, forcing Congress to appropriate additional borrowed funds to cover some veterans' health care services. To fix this problem, Congress needs to continue to direct VA to improve its third-party billings and collections procedures.

The private sector uses specialty service providers that utilize automated appeals and are willing to work with the VA to improve collections. The private sector wants to be part of the solution but is resisted whenever the VA is contacted. An automated appeals process may collect only millions of dollars, but money is money.

I learned of this matter as a member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee in the last Congress. After reviewing pertinent information, I introduced legislation that now is HR 360, the Veterans Fiscal Responsibility Act. That bill would place into statutory law language directing VA to automate the collection of third-party bills, especially those not fully paid and appealable, regardless of the amount owed under any single claim.

I believe that my legislation complements actions that the Committee has been taking for years. Beginning in FY16, this Committee told the VA to institute a pilot program to go after appealable billings with an automated system now being utilized by many private sector providers. In subsequent years, the Committee has repeated its concerns, most recently in the FY21 Appropriations bill.

I urge the Committee to continue to insist that the VA improve its third-party collections practices. The information that VA provided to the Committee in February has been informative, but Congress must insist that VA do more. When you prepare the FY22 bill and report, please continue to insist on recent data from VA and on measurable improvements in the billings and collections process. An audit by GAO or VAOIG also might be helpful to our mutual efforts.

After their brave sacrifices for our country's security, the last thing America's veterans should be worried about are the VA's inefficient collections procedures.

I will continue to do my part with HR 360 before the authorizing committee. I thank you for your past efforts and urge you to continue them in the FY22 bill. Together we can maintain health care programs for our veterans and save taxpayers' money.