



IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN
VETERANS OF AMERICA

Statement of Nick McCormick, Legislative Associate
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans Of America
before the
House Committee on Veterans Affairs
Oversight and Investigation Subcommittee

June 19, 2013

Bill #	Bill Name	Sponsor	Position
H.R. 1490	Veteran's Privacy Act	Miller	Support
H.R. 1792	Infectious Disease Reporting Act	Coffman	Support
H.R. 1804	Foreign Travel Accountability Act	Huelskamp	Support

Chairman Coffman, Ranking Member Kirkpatrick, and Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), I would like to extend our gratitude for being given the opportunity to share with you our views and recommendations regarding these important pieces of legislation.

IAVA is the nation's first and largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization for veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and their supporters. Founded in 2004, our mission is important but simple – to improve the lives of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and their families. With a steadily growing base of over 200,000 members and supporters, we strive to help create a society that honors and supports veterans of all generations.

IAVA believes that effective oversight of veteran issues is integral to the successful implementation of policy and to the delivery of services that affect the lives of America's veteran population. The men and women who volunteer to serve in our nation's military enter into a unique agreement of trust with their government. This trust mandates persistent oversight of and, when necessary, deliberate investigation into the agencies and mechanisms charged with delivery of services to this unique population.

H.R. 1490

IAVA supports H.R. 1490, the Veterans' Privacy Act, which would ensure that any visual recording made of a patient during the course of care through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is conducted only with the consent of that patient or, in appropriate cases, a representative of the patient. There are, undoubtedly, certain circumstances that may warrant the installation of monitoring devices in patient rooms for the safety of both patients and staff or to monitor a patient's behavioral



activity, just as heart and respiration monitors are often needed to monitor a patient's physiological activity. However, IAVA believes that veterans and/or their family members who are receiving medical treatment at VA facilities, or their representatives, should be notified of the facility administration's intent – in consultation with the medical professionals directly involved in delivering care – to place cameras and other monitoring equipment in a patient's room, and no such action should be undertaken without the expressed consent of the patient or their representative.

H.R. 1792

IAVA supports H.R. 1792, the Infectious Disease Reporting Act, which would direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to report each case of reportable infectious disease (a disease that a state requires to be reported) that occurs at a medical facility of the VA to the appropriate state entity, as well as to the accrediting organization of such facility.

In 2011-12, 32 people were infected with Legionnaires' disease in the Pittsburgh area. It was later determined that the source of at least 5, and potentially up to 21 of these infections was contaminated water at the O'Hara and Oakland campuses of the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System. Had this bill been law at the time of this outbreak, the number of infected people could potentially have been far lower. Indeed, the CDC's after-action-report on this incident indicated that poor communication and procedural missteps in the VA Pittsburgh system were just as much to blame for the outbreak as the Legionella bacteria itself.

Our veterans have been taught that the ability to communicate effectively is one of the most essential characteristics of good leadership and is integral to mission success. IAVA fully supports the Infectious Disease Reporting Act because it represents the kind of common-sense communication policy that American veterans deserve with regard to their healthcare.

H.R. 1804

IAVA supports H.R. 1804, the Foreign Travel Accountability Act, which would direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to report semiannually to the congressional veterans committees on official foreign travel made by VA employees. VA employees are at the frontlines of assisting American veterans and their family members with healthcare issues, educational benefits, and disability claims, and IAVA commends these employees for their work. However, according to VA reports provided to this committee, VA employees have taken over 1,300 trips for unspecified or unacceptably vague purposes. From the Internal Revenue Service to the General Services Administration, government spending scandals have become much too common an occurrence.

The responsibility of the VA to support the nation's veterans necessitates that the VA be held to the highest ethical standards with regard to the management of public funds. Many of America's veterans and their families are experiencing great financial hardship while waiting for their disability claims to be processed, and many of them are waiting while they struggle to cope with the physical, emotional, and mental scars of war. IAVA supports the Foreign Travel Accountability Act because our veteran members understand better than most that every penny counts, and every penny should be accounted for.

Mr. Chairman, we at IAVA again appreciate the opportunity to offer our views on these important pieces of legislation, and we look forward to continuing to work with each of you, your staff, and the Subcommittee to improve the lives of veterans and their families. Thank you for your time and attention.