

109TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# H. R. 1741

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct a pilot program to improve access to health care for rural veterans, and for other purposes.

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## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APRIL 20, 2005

Mr. OSBORNE (for himself, Mr. KIND, Mr. MOORE of Kansas, Mr. ROSS, Mr. PAUL, Mr. OTTER, Mr. CASE, Mr. WICKER, Mr. ALEXANDER, Mr. SHIMKUS, Mr. WILSON of South Carolina, Mr. TIAHRT, Mr. PETERSON of Pennsylvania, Mr. PORTER, Mr. ADERHOLT, Mr. WAMP, Mrs. CAPPS, Mr. GREEN of Wisconsin, Mr. MCINTYRE, Mr. HASTINGS of Washington, Mr. NORWOOD, Mrs. EMERSON, and Mrs. MUSGRAVE) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

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## A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct a pilot program to improve access to health care for rural veterans, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

### 3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Rural Veterans Access  
5 to Care Act of 2005”.

1 **SEC. 2. PILOT PROGRAM FOR IMPROVED ACCESS TO**  
2 **HEALTH CARE FOR RURAL VETERANS.**

3 (a) PILOT PROGRAM.—The Secretary of Veterans Af-  
4 fairs shall conduct a pilot program for a means to improve  
5 access to medical services for highly rural or geographi-  
6 cally remote veterans through expanded use of the Sec-  
7 retary's contract authority under section 1703 of title 38,  
8 United States Code, and other authorities available to the  
9 Secretary to improve such access.

10 (b) AREAS FOR CONDUCT OF PILOT PROGRAM.—The  
11 pilot program shall be conducted in three geographic serv-  
12 ice regions, referred to as Veterans Integrated Service  
13 Networks, of the Veterans Health Administration. The  
14 Secretary shall select the Veterans Integrated Service Net-  
15 work designated as Number 23 as one of the regions for  
16 the conduct of the pilot program and shall select the other  
17 two from those Veterans Integrated Service Networks that  
18 have a substantial population of highly rural or geographi-  
19 cally remote veterans (as determined under subsection  
20 (f)).

21 (c) MEDICAL SERVICES UNDER PILOT PROGRAM.—  
22 Under the pilot program, the Secretary shall provide,  
23 through the use of the Secretary's contract authority  
24 under section 1703 of title 38, United States Code, and  
25 other authorities available to the Secretary, for the treat-

1 ment of covered veterans by health-care providers outside  
2 the Department of Veterans Affairs for the following:

3 (1) Acute or chronic symptom management.

4 (2) Nontherapeutic medical services.

5 (3) Other medical services as determined appro-  
6 priate in the case of any veteran by the director of  
7 the appropriate geographic service region of the De-  
8 partment, after consultation with the Department  
9 physician responsible for primary care of the vet-  
10 eran.

11 (d) FUNDS FOR PILOT PROGRAM.—For any fiscal  
12 year during which the pilot program is conducted, the Sec-  
13 retary shall allocate for the pilot program 0.9 percent of  
14 the total amount appropriated for that fiscal year for Med-  
15 ical Services. Such allocation shall be made before any  
16 other allocation of such funds is made, and any remaining  
17 allocation of such funds for any such fiscal year shall be  
18 made without regard to the allocation under the preceding  
19 sentence.

20 (e) COVERED VETERANS.—For the purposes of this  
21 section, covered veterans are veterans—

22 (1) who are enrolled in the veterans health care  
23 system under section 1705 of this title or have a  
24 service-connected disability; and

1           (2) who, pursuant to subsection (f), are consid-  
2       ered to be highly rural or geographically remote vet-  
3       erans.

4       (f) HIGHLY RURAL OR GEOGRAPHICALLY REMOTE  
5 VETERANS.—The Secretary shall prescribe by regulation  
6 standards for determination of which veterans are consid-  
7 ered to be highly rural or geographically remote veterans  
8 for the purposes of this section. The Secretary shall in-  
9 clude as such a veteran any veteran for whom the driving  
10 distance to reach a Department health-care facility is 60  
11 miles or greater. The Secretary may provide for a lesser  
12 driving distance in the case of any veteran if the Secretary  
13 determines that driving 60 miles or more imposes a hard-  
14 ship on such veteran or otherwise is not in the best inter-  
15 est of the veteran.

16       (g) PERIOD OF PILOT PROGRAM.—The pilot program  
17 shall be conducted during fiscal years 2006, 2007, and  
18 2008.

19       (h) REPORT TO CONGRESS.—Not later than Feb-  
20 ruary 1, 2009, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a  
21 report on the operation of the pilot program. The Sec-  
22 retary shall include in the report such recommendations  
23 as the Secretary considers appropriate concerning exten-  
24 sion of the pilot program or other means to improve access

- 1 to medical services for highly rural or geographically re-
- 2 mote veterans.

