

REQUIRING STUDY FOR DENTAL AND VISION BENEFITS FOR FEDERAL EMPLOYEES

Mrs. MILLER of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3751) to require that the Office of Personnel Management study and present options under which dental and vision benefits could be made available to Federal employees and retirees and other appropriate classes of individuals, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 3751

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. REPORTING REQUIREMENT.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 6 months after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Office of Personnel Management shall submit to Congress a report describing and evaluating options whereby additional dental, vision, and hearing benefits could be made available to—

(1) Federal employees and annuitants;

(2) qualified relatives of Federal employees and annuitants; and

(3) other appropriate classes of individuals.

(b) REQUIRED CONTENT.—The report shall include—

(1) a description of the dental, vision, and hearing benefits currently available under the Federal employees health benefits program;

(2) a description of the supplemental dental, vision, and hearing plans currently offered by carriers participating in the Federal employees health benefits program;

(3) a description of specific dental, vision, and hearing benefits that could be offered in addition to those described in paragraphs (1) and (2), including any maximums, limitations, exclusions, and definitions that might be relevant;

(4) a description of the specific classes of individuals (as referred to generally in paragraphs (1) through (3) of subsection (a)) to whom those additional benefits should be made available, including any definitions and other terms or conditions that might be relevant;

(5) a description and assessment of the various contracting arrangements by which the Government could make those additional benefits available, including whether such benefits should be contracted for on a regional or national basis;

(6) the estimated cost of those additional benefits, including an analysis relating to whether any regular Government contributions or allocation for start-up costs might be necessary or appropriate;

(7) a description of how those additional benefits could be made available through—

(A) the Federal employees health benefits program;

(B) one or more plans outside the Federal employees health benefits program, including supplemental plans referred to in paragraph (2);

(C) the program described in subparagraph (A) in combination with one or more of the plans described in subparagraph (B); and

(D) any other dental, vision, and hearing coverage delivery method;

(8) an analysis of the advantages and disadvantages associated with the alternatives described under paragraph (7), including—

(A) the relative cost-effectiveness and efficiency of each;

(B) the likely impact of each alternative on the overall attractiveness of the Federal employees health benefits program to individuals eligible to enroll, particularly Federal employees and annuitants; and

(C) the extent to which each alternative might affect the relative competitiveness of the various carriers and plans currently participating in the Federal employees health benefits program (including as a provider of supplemental benefits);

(9) a recommendation from the Office as to its preferred method or methods for providing those additional benefits; and

(10) any proposed legislation or other measures the Office considers necessary in order to implement any of the foregoing.

(c) SCREENING FOR GLAUCOMA.—For purposes of this Act, the term “vision benefits” includes benefits relating to screening for glaucoma.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from Michigan (Mrs. MILLER) and the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Michigan (Mrs. MILLER).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mrs. MILLER of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 3751, the bill under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Michigan?

There was no objection.

Mrs. MILLER of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself as much time as I might consume.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Committee on Government Reform, I rise in support of H.R. 3751, an important piece of legislation for all Federal employees. This bill requires the Federal Government to analyze available options to provide those who work in the civil service with better dental and vision benefits. These benefits may be provided through the existing structure of the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program or as stand-alone additional coverage.

Specifically, H.R. 3751 requires the Office of Personnel Management to study and to submit a report to Congress on how the government can provide dental and vision benefits to Federal employees.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. JO ANN DAVIS), the distinguished Chair of the Subcommittee on Civil Service and Agency Organization, for offering H.R. 3751; and I certainly congratulate her today for moving the bill to the floor today. Along with the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. TOM DAVIS), the chairman of the full Committee on Government Reform, as well as my distinguished colleague, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DAVIS), the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Civil Service and Agency Organization, the gentleman from Virginia (Mrs. JO ANN DAVIS) is a leader in the Congress in representing the Nation's integral and steadfast Federal employees.

Every single day, civil servants protect the Nation's streets. They teach

our children, they deliver the mail, they treat the sick, the injured. They perform countless other duties that help make America thrive.

H.R. 3751 a terrific step towards providing these individuals with the health benefits that they have earned and deserve. I urge its adoption.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, visual health and oral health are integral to our general health, as the House well knows. Oral and eye diseases are progressive and become more complex over time. Our ability to eat, see, read, learn, and communicate all depend on good visual and oral health.

Periodic eye and dental examinations are an important part of routine preventive health care. Many visual and oral conditions present no obvious symptoms. Therefore, individuals often are unaware that such problems exist.

There are safe and effective measures to prevent the most common eye and dental diseases. That is why early diagnosis and treatment are important for maintaining good visual and oral health and why a vision and dental benefit should be made available to Federal employees and annuitants.

We know that in 1987 the Office of Personnel Management stopped plans in the Federal Health Benefits program from adding new vision and dental packages. OPM did so for various reasons. However, the decision was made over 15 years ago, and it is time to take a fresh look at how we can meet the visual and oral health needs of Federal employees.

In the long run, preventive care, through periodic examinations and doctor visits, will help keep down long-term vision and dental costs due to early detection.

To further improve the bill, during subcommittee consideration of H.R. 3751, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DAVIS) offered an amendment requiring OPM to include glaucoma screening and hearing benefits in its study.

The amendment would require OPM to study the feasibility of providing hearing benefits to Federal employees and retirees. Currently, over 28 million Americans suffer hearing loss, half of whom are under the age of 50. Hearing loss is not just a problem affecting adults. Thirty-three children are born every day with some form of hearing loss. With early detection and treatment, these children can be taught in regular classes, saving a school system as much as half a billion dollars during a 12-year education.

Like vision and dental benefits, most insurance plans do not provide hearing benefits, such as coverage for hearing aids. We believe the Federal Government should consider taking a lead in this area.

In addition to hearing benefits, the gentleman from Illinois' (Mr. DAVIS) amendment required OPM to include

glaucoma screening in its study. This amendment was offered to better understand H.R. 3268, which was introduced by the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS).

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H.R. 3268 would extend the same glaucoma screening coverage provided by Medicare to Federal employees who are in high-risk populations.

The studies conducted by OPM under H.R. 3751 will go a long way in helping the Federal Government to craft a better dental, vision and hearing benefit for Federal employees.

Mrs. JO ANN DAVIS of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 3751, a bill to require the Office of Personnel Management to study and recommend options for enhancing the dental, vision and hearing benefits available to Federal employees. As the Federal Government strives to recruit top talent around the Nation, this issue plays a significant strategic role in attracting and retaining the very best to serve our country.

Currently, the dental, vision and hearing offerings available to those covered by the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP) can be described as inadequate at best. The Government's employees are often without proper dental care as part of their health insurance coverage. In fact, most plans in the FEHBP either do not offer dental and vision care, or cover only very minimal, basic procedures. While some plans do offer a supplemental dental package, they come at the cost of a very high premium.

By contract, dental and vision benefits offered to many employees in the private sector are more generous. A 2002 study by the Society for Human Resource Management determined that 96 percent of private sector firms offered dental coverage benefits. Furthermore, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that these private plans usually cover 100 percent of routine procedures and 50–80 percent of more expensive procedures.

According to the Office of Personal Management, Federal employees and retirees cite improved dental coverage as their most desired benefit enhancement. With these benefits so widely available in the private sector, the Federal Government cannot afford to ignore this issue, or it will lose the war for talent more often than it will win. The Government depends greatly on its competitive benefits packages to attract well-qualified candidates, and should explore the possibility of enhancing such benefits.

Putting more money into the system is not necessarily the answer, and this bill does not call for that. It simply requires the Federal Government's personnel experts, OPM, to study how to resolve this problem.

Whatever it reveals, the goal of the report is to recommend options for improving the availability of dental, vision and hearing benefits to employees in a way that fits within the current budgetary constraints. I urge all members to support H.R. 3751.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mrs. MILLER of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. TERRY). The question is on the motion

offered by the gentlewoman from Michigan (Mrs. MILLER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3751, as amended.

The title of the bill was amended so as to read:

“A bill to require that the Office of Personnel Management study current practices under which dental, vision, and hearing benefits are made available to Federal employees, annuitants, and other classes of individuals, and to require that the Office also present options and recommendations relating to how additional dental, vision, and hearing benefits could be made so available.”.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

2004 DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA OMNIBUS AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mrs. MILLER of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3797) to authorize improvements in the operations of the government of the District of Columbia, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 3797

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “2004 District of Columbia Omnibus Authorization Act”.

SEC. 2. REQUIRING SUBMISSION OF PLAN BY SCHOOL BOARD FOR ALLOCATION OF FUNDS UNDER MAYOR'S PROPOSED BUDGET.

Section 452 of the District of Columbia Home Rule Act (sec. 1–204.52, D.C. Official Code) is amended—

(1) in the first sentence, by striking “With respect to” and inserting “(a) ROLE OF MAYOR AND COUNCIL.—With respect to”;

(2) in the second sentence, by striking “This section” and inserting “This subsection”; and

(3) by adding at the end the following new subsection:

“(b) PLAN FOR ALLOCATION OF FUNDS UNDER PROPOSED BUDGET.—

“(1) SUBMISSION OF PLAN TO COUNCIL.—Not later than March 1 of each year or the date on which the Mayor makes the proposed annual budget for a year available under section 442 (whichever occurs later), the Board of Education shall submit to the Council a plan for the allocation of the Mayor's proposed budget among various object classes and responsibility centers (as defined under regulations of the Board).

“(2) CONTENTS.—The plan submitted under this subsection shall include a detailed presentation of how much money will be allocated to each school, including—

“(A) a specific description of the amount of funds available to the school for which spending decisions are under the control of the school; and

“(B) a specific description of other responsibility center funds which will be spent in a manner directly benefiting the school, including funds which will be spent for personnel, equipment and supplies, property maintenance, and student services.”.

SEC. 3. MULTIYEAR CONTRACTING AUTHORITY AND LEASING AGREEMENTS FOR DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COURTS.

(a) AUTHORITY.—Subchapter III of chapter 17 of title 11, District of Columbia Code, is amended by inserting after section 11–1742 the following new section:

“§ 11–1742a. Multiyear contracting authority and leasing agreements

“(a) SEVERABLE SERVICES CONTRACTS FOR PERIODS CROSSING FISCAL YEARS.—The Executive Officer may enter into a contract for procurement of severable services in the same manner and to the same extent as the head of an executive agency may enter into such a contract under section 303L of title III of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949 (41 U.S.C. 253l).

“(b) MULTIYEAR LEASING AGREEMENTS.—

“(1) AUTHORITY.—The Executive Officer may enter into a lease agreement for the accommodation of the District of Columbia courts in a building which is in existence or being erected by the lessor to accommodate the District of Columbia courts.

“(2) TERMS.—A lease agreement under this subsection shall be on terms the Executive Officer considers to be in the interest of the Federal Government and the District of Columbia and necessary for the accommodation of the District of Columbia courts. However, the lease agreement may not bind the District of Columbia courts for more than 10 years and the obligation of amounts for a lease under this subsection is limited to the current fiscal year for which payments are due without regard to section 1341(a)(1)(B) of title 31, United States Code.

“(c) MULTIYEAR CONTRACTS.—

“(1) AUTHORITY.—The Executive Officer may enter into a multiyear contract for the acquisition of property or services in the same manner and to the same extent as an executive agency may enter into such a contract under section 304B of title III of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949 (41 U.S.C. 254c). In applying such authority—

“(A) in section 304B(a)(2)(B)—

“(i) ‘the best interests of the District of Columbia and the Federal Government’ shall be substituted for ‘the best interests of the United States’; and

“(ii) ‘the courts’ programs’ shall be substituted for ‘the agency’s programs’;

“(B) the second sentence of section 304B(b), and subsection (e), shall not apply; and

“(C) in section 304B(c), ‘\$5,000,000’ shall be substituted for ‘\$10,000,000’.

“(2) CANCELLATION OR TERMINATION FOR INSUFFICIENT FUNDING AFTER FIRST YEAR.—In the event that funds are not made available for the continuation of a multiyear contract for services into a subsequent fiscal year, the contract shall be canceled or terminated, and the costs of cancellation or termination may be paid from—

“(A) appropriations originally available for the performance of the contract concerned;

“(B) appropriations currently available for procurement of the type of services concerned, and not otherwise obligated; or

“(C) funds appropriated for those payments.”.

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections for subchapter III of chapter 17 of title 11, District of Columbia Code, is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 11–1742 the following new item:

“11–1742a. Multiyear contracting authority and leasing agreements.”.

SEC. 4. ESTABLISHMENT OF ACADEMIC YEAR AS FISCAL YEAR FOR DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA SCHOOLS.

Section 441 of the District of Columbia Home Rule Act (sec. 1–204.41, D.C. Official Code) is amended—

(1) in the first sentence, by striking “The fiscal year” and inserting “(a) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in subsection (b), the fiscal year”;

(2) by striking the third sentence; and

(3) by adding at the end the following new subsection: