

WASHINGTON DC - Congressman Steny Hoyer released the following statement following passage tonight of the Federal Employee Dental and Vision Benefits Enhancement Act of 2004, which enjoyed wide bipartisan support:

"I am pleased that the House tonight adopted S. 2657, the Federal Employee Dental and Vision Benefits Enhancement Act of 2004, to provide federal employees access to affordable dental and vision insurance.

"The legislation will provide a dental and vision benefit, with participating federal employees paying the premium costs. By using the purchasing power of the federal government, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) will have the ability to provide more affordable dental and vision coverage to employees and retirees than would be available to individuals purchasing this insurance on their own.

"Providing a dental and vision program to federal employees and retirees is long overdue. Not only does it represent a valuable benefit, it will also make the federal government's benefit package more competitive with similar benefits offered by the private sector. That can only help in efforts to recruit and retain the best quality employees the marketplace has to offer.

"The legislation is not perfect, and I regard it as only a start toward providing a real and affordable dental and vision benefit to active and retired federal employees and their families. It is my hope and expectation that in the 109th Congress, the House and Senate will seriously consider having the federal government assume a significant portion of the premium for dental and vision benefits. Federal employees should not have to bear 100 percent of the cost of these benefits."

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