



Paralyzed Veterans
of America

WASHINGTON UPDATE

Recent news regarding legislation and regulatory actions affecting veterans and people with disabilities.

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PRELIMINARY ELECTION RESULTS

PVA is continuing to monitor the results of the November 3rd election. While the majority of individual elections have been called, none of the results are yet official. Currently, it appears there will be a new Administration, that Democrats will retain the House, and that control of the Senate will not be decided until January's Georgia Senate runoff elections. We also know that there will be some changes on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee as Ranking Member Phil Roe (R-TN) decided not to run for reelection. Regardless of the outcome of the outstanding races, there will also be fewer veterans serving in the 117th Congress.

Of those up for reelection, nearly all of the sponsors of some of PVA's Legislative and Advocacy priorities from this Congress will return in January. Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME), sponsor of the AUTO for Veterans Act, won reelection in Maine. Sen. Gary Peters (D-MI), sponsor of the TEAM Veteran Caregivers Act, will also be returning to the Senate for another term. Rep. Rick Larsen (D-WA), sponsor of the Women Veterans and Families Health Services Act of 2019; Rep. John Larson (D-CT), Chair of the Ways and Means Social Security Subcommittee and chief sponsor of the Social Security 2100 Act; and sponsor of the Air Carrier Access Amendments Act and the REAADI for Disasters Act, Rep. James Langevin (D-RI), were also reelected. However, the chief sponsor of the Disaster Relief Medicaid Act (DRMA), Rep. Donna Shalala (D-FL), lost her bid for another term.

We will continue to assess the outcome of the election and provide greater coverage of the results and their potential impact on PVA members in our next issue of the Washington Update.

FAVORABLE DOWN BALLOT DECISIONS WILL BENEFIT VETERANS AND THEIR SURVIVORS

In addition to electing candidates to office, voters in the November election also considered state and local issues. We are aware of at least three states where voters overwhelmingly approved down ballot issues significantly benefiting veterans or their survivors.

First, Florida residents approved an amendment that would transfer Homestead Property Tax discounts of veterans with permanent combat-related disabilities to their surviving spouse. This

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discount will remain in effect until the spouse remarries, dies, or sells or disposes of the property. Currently, the discount expires upon the veteran's death.

Meanwhile voters in New Jersey agreed to an amendment that gives a \$250 property tax deduction to veterans who did not serve in a time of war and the widow or widower of such a veteran would still be able to receive this deduction after the veteran's death. It also extends the 100 percent property tax exemption for disabled veterans to veterans who became disabled during peacetime military service. Currently, these property tax deductions and exemptions are only given to veterans who served during a period of war.

Finally, roughly half of all states charge a vehicle property tax, including Virginia, but that will soon change for certain veterans residing there. Voters agreed to provide veterans who have 100 percent service-connected, permanent, and total disabilities with a tax exemption for one automobile or pickup truck. Prior to the election, proponents of the change noted many of these disabled veterans need adapted vehicles and the personal property tax was often a barrier for catastrophically disabled veterans with lower incomes to obtain such cars. The disability rating must be confirmed by VA, and the veteran's car or truck would be exempt from taxation beginning on the date the veteran gets the vehicle or on January 1, 2021, whichever is later.

THE ACCESS BOARD REPORTS RESOLVED CASES IN FISCAL YEAR 2020

The Access Board is charged with enforcing the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) of 1968. The ABA requires that buildings or facilities that were designed, built, or altered with federal dollars or leased by federal agencies after August 12, 1968, be accessible.

In Fiscal Year 2020, the Access Board resolved 55 cases through corrective action taken by the responsible federal party. The majority of cases concerned access to U.S. post offices, which is typical of the Board's yearly caseload. There are over 30,000 post offices in the U.S., many of which occupy older buildings. The U.S. Postal Service completed action to correct accessibility issues at 37 facilities under the ABA over the course of the fiscal year. Most cases concerned entrance doors and customer parking.

Other cases concerned access to parking, elevators, or restrooms at military bases and camps, shipyards, fleet readiness centers, and VA medical facilities. At the Kilauea Military Camp in Volcano, Hawaii, the Department of the Army installed compliant toilet and shower rooms in four accessible cottages and two guest buildings at the Morale, Welfare, and Recreation center.

The ABA is not limited to federal facilities and applies to other sites that received federal funding. One case concerned New York City's Rockaway Boardwalk, which was severely damaged by Super Storm Sandy in 2012. The City's Department of Parks and Recreation, which received federal grants to rebuild portions of the boardwalk, restored ramp access at two locations in response to the Board's investigation. Recipients of funding from the Department of

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Transportation, including a city in North Carolina and a regional transit authority in Washington, undertook corrective action to address access to public sidewalks and parking.

NEWS ITEMS OF NOTE

- **“Ready to Roll” Initiative to Improve Disaster Preparedness for Wheelchair Users**

United Spinal has announced the launch of a comprehensive disaster preparedness initiative for individuals with spinal cord injuries and disorders, designed to lessen the effects and risks associated with natural or human-caused disasters. The [“Ready to Roll”](#) initiative will address the significant challenges wheelchair users and other individuals living with disabilities face when disasters strike.

- **Research Brief: “The Extra Costs of Living with a Disability in the U.S.”**

National Disability Institute (NDI), in partnership with the Stony Brook University School of Social Welfare and the University of Tennessee College of Social Work, released a brief that summarizes research on out-of-pocket expenses faced by individuals with disabilities compared to individuals without disabilities. Research indicates that a household with an adult who has a work-related disability will need an average of 28 percent more income to obtain the same standard of living as a comparable household without a member who has a disability.

The brief recommends “resetting the policy table” for greater equity by addressing the tax code and eligibility criteria for public benefits. To review the brief, please [click here](#).

- **HVAC Survey on C&P Exams**

The House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs wants your input on VA compensation and pension or C&P exams. If you are currently scheduled for a C&P exam, or have received one in the past, please fill out their survey to ensure our members’ voices are represented. You can access the survey [here](#).

- **Free National Parks Access for Veterans**

The U.S. Department of Interior recently announced they will be granting free entrance to national parks, wildlife refuges, and other federally-managed public lands to all U.S. military veterans and Gold Star families. Unlike previous years where fees were waived for a set period, this change is permanent—meaning entrance fees and standard amenity fees charged by the Bureau of Land Management and Bureau of Reclamation will be waived for veterans and Gold Star families from this point forward. For purposes of this program, a veteran is identified as an individual who has served in the United States Armed Forces, including the National Guard and Reserves, and is able to present one of the forms of identification listed below.

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- Department of Defense Identification Card
- Veteran Health Identification Card (VHIC)
- Veteran ID Card
- Veterans designation on a state-issued U.S. driver's license or identification card

VIRTUAL EVENT

- **PVA's Women Veterans Empowerment Seminar**

Registration is open for the **Women Veterans Empowerment Seminar!** Paralyzed Veterans of America welcomes women veterans with a disability to attend a free two-day, 6-hour **virtual seminar** focused on Empowerment; taking control of your life to become stronger and more independent. We're excited to feature Paralympian **Melissa Stockwell** as a keynote speaker for the session: *Baghdad to Rio and Beyond*.

Event Date: November 18 & 19, 2020

Event Time: 11 a.m. - 2 p.m., EST each day

[Registration Link](#)

[View the Full Agenda on the Online Event Guide](#)