



Paralyzed Veterans
of America

WASHINGTON UPDATE

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

Written and produced by Paralyzed Veterans of America - Government Relations Department

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AMERICAN AIRLINES REVISES WEIGHT LIMITS ON REGIONAL AIRCRAFT

In response to a requirement from the Canadian government, American Airlines published earlier this year weight limits for assistive devices stowed on their aircraft. In October, John Morris, a wheelchair user and travel blogger, was denied travel due to the weight of his power wheelchair. This incident resulted in an extreme amount of anxiety among passengers with disabilities who use power wheelchairs who feared that they would be denied boarding or have their chair damaged due to its being dismantled in order to meet the weight limit requirements.

Following an outcry from the disability community, including a letter from PVA and 17 other disability and veterans organizations, American worked with the manufacturers of its regional jets on their interpretation of weight limits for those aircraft. On November 23, American announced that it has eliminated the conservative weight guidelines and replaced them with guidelines, approved and reviewed by FAA, that better reflect the ability of the cargo floor to support mobility devices and wheelchairs based on their distributed weight. Their [website](#) has been updated to reflect distributed weight limits for their regional aircraft.

We understand this change should ensure that American is able to continue to transport large power wheelchairs on their regional aircraft. Please contact Heather Ansley, Associate Executive Director, Government Relations, at heathera@pva.org if you encounter any difficulties on American Airlines related to carriage of wheelchairs.

TRANSITION OF POWER BEGINS IN WASHINGTON

Following the outcome of the November 3 election, the Biden-Harris Agency Review Transition teams have started meeting with stakeholders to learn more about their priorities for the incoming Administration. PVA recently met with the leaders of the VA's transition team and provided information about our goals for the new Administration. Some of the priorities relayed included: preserving access to specialized health care services, reversing recent decisions by the Veterans Benefits Administration that will harm the VA claims process, and increasing access to long-term care within VA for veterans with spinal cord injuries and disorders. PVA has

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also met with the team for the Department of Transportation and will be meeting with other agencies in the coming weeks.

On Capitol Hill, the Democrats have retained the House after winning more than the 218 seats necessary to retain control of the chamber. Control of the Senate hinges on a pair of January runoff elections in Georgia. Meanwhile the House and Senate's top leadership will remain unchanged as Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY), House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA), and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) were easily reelected by members of their respective parties.

UPDATE ON AGENT ORANGE PROVISION IN NDAA

The House and Senate have entered formal negotiations on the fiscal year 2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Conferees will take a final look at provisions in the House and Senate versions of the bill before choosing what stays in the final bill and what gets discarded. One of these items is a Senate-approved provision that would add bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, and Parkinsonism to VA's list of presumptive diseases connected to Agent Orange exposure. Opposition to this change centers on cost. PVA believes a price tag should not serve as a barrier to providing the benefits long delayed to these Vietnam War veterans. We encourage [PVA Chapters and members to ask their members of Congress](#) to instruct conferees to retain this provision in the final NDAA.

TEAM VETERAN CAREGIVERS ACT PASSES SENATE

S. 2216, the "Transparency and Effective Accountability Measures for Veteran Caregivers Act" (TEAM Veteran Caregivers Act) passed the Senate on November 17 by unanimous consent.

In 2018 VA's Office of the Inspector General [reported](#) that the Department failed to adequately manage its Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) and recommended improvements and reforms. For much of the past two years, PVA has been working with Senators Gary Peters (D-MI) and Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) to craft this legislation which directs several changes to improve the program.

As passed by the Senate, the TEAM Veteran Caregivers Act:

Ensures all caregivers are included in the veterans' medical records. Currently, only certain caregivers participating in the Caregiver Support Program are included in veterans' medical records. Including all caregivers in medical records strengthens communication between VA and caregivers and recognizes them as part of the clinical team.

Requires a minimum standard of information in downgrade notification letters. This bill would require VA to provide an explanation of any downgrade or termination decisions. Caregivers have reported that their decision letters are sometimes missing important information that would be necessary to file an appeal.

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Extends benefits after certain veterans are deemed ineligible for the program. Caregivers have reported being dropped within a couple weeks of receiving a termination letter and have no time to appeal or make new accommodations. This bill codifies VA's goal of maintaining care for an extended period of 150 days in certain cases where a veteran is terminated from the program.

S. 2216 has been presented to the House where it awaits further action.

NEWS ITEMS OF NOTE

- **U.S. Access Board Launched New Website** – The U.S. Access Board has redesigned and updated its [website](#). The new site features a streamlined design to make information easier to find. New menus and cross links enhance navigation of key resources, including the ADA Accessibility Standards and the Section 508 Standards. In addition, the site updates information on Board programs and services, including training and filing of complaints under the Architectural Barriers Act. Send questions or comments on the site to webmaster@access-board.gov.
- **DOL VETS Celebrates Veterans Day** – The Department of Labor (DOL) Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS) hosted a variety of events around Veterans Day. DOL VETS Assistant Secretary John Lowry wrote an [oped](#) that was published in the Kansas City Star and posted a [video message](#). DOL VETS held the HIREVets Medallion Award Ceremony and the 675 Medallion Award recipients can be found at HIREVets.gov. The Assistant Secretary also took part in a wreath laying ceremony at DOL Veterans Park with DOL Secretary Eugene Scalia.
- **Disability Inclusive Emergency Preparedness Effort Launched** – The Association of University Centers on Disability and National Center on Disability and Public Health are undertaking Prepared4All, an initiative that aims to increase the number of individuals with disabilities and disability organizations that are actively engaged in local emergency planning efforts. Prepared4All links disability organizations and individuals with emergency management agencies, public health professionals, and health provider organizations on a local level. Inclusion coaches from the disability community will form “Action Teams” that will collaborate with local emergency management, public health, and health providers to offer a menu of services to support disability inclusion. To learn more about the “Prepared4All” initiative, click [here](#) or email Prepared4All@aucd.org.
- **ODEP Blog on Inclusive Apprenticeships** - Carolyn Jones and Lydia Parenteau, Policy Advisors in the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), wrote a blog on ["Inclusive Apprenticeships: Connecting Employers and Career Seekers"](#) in recognition of National Apprenticeship Week. Jones and Parenteau highlighted the ODEP-funded

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Apprenticeship Inclusion Models initiative, which focuses on apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs that provide skills training to youth and adults with disabilities in high-demand, high-wage industries. They also discussed Universal Design for Learning principles, workplace accommodations, and inclusive workplace technologies.

- **VA's First EHR Modernization Deployment a Success** - Following three delays since November 2019, VA has [launched](#) its Electronic Health Record Modernization (EHRM) system at the Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center in Spokane, WA. Along with Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center, the Cerner-led project deployed at the medical center's four associated community-based outpatient clinics and the West Consolidated Patient Account Center in Las Vegas, NV.

WEBINARS AND HEARINGS

- **PVA Webinar on VA's Comprehensive Caregiver Program Now Available** - On November 10, PVA hosted a webinar entitled, "What PVA Members Should Know About Changes to the VA Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers." The webinar is now available on pva.org. The direct link is available [here](#).
- **Upcoming House Veterans' Affairs Committee Hearing** - On December 2 at 10:00 am ET, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee will host a hearing titled, "A Time for Change: Assessing the Need to Modernize Veteran Eligibility for Care." Roscoe Butler, Associate Legislative Director, will testify on behalf of PVA. The hearing will be available for streaming on the committee's [website](#).