



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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## CONFIRMATION HEARING HELD FOR VA SECRETARY NOMINEE

On January 27, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee held a hearing to consider President Biden's nomination of [Denis McDonough](#) to be the next VA Secretary. During his confirmation hearing, McDonough, who is not a veteran, stated that he would succeed if confirmed. McDonough answered questions from Senators about topics ranging from VA's modernization efforts to preventing veteran suicide. He pledged to work with the Committee to resolve many of the department's enduring problems such as its burgeoning bureaucracy, lack of transparency, the claims and appeals backlogs, accessibility challenges for both education and health care, and modernizing its infrastructure. McDonough told Committee members that most of his decisions would be based on whether they increase access and improve outcomes for veterans.

Two of his responses related to PVA legislative goals. If confirmed, he promised to take another look at VA rules for the recently expanded VA comprehensive caregiver program to see if eligibility rules are consistent with what Congress intended. He also agreed to work with the Committee to make IVF services a regular part of VA's medical services package. A strong, bipartisan tone was evident throughout the hearing, which was led by newly minted Chairman Jon Tester (D-MT). The Committee is slated to vote on the nomination on February 2. You can view the full hearing [here](#).

## WAYS AND MEANS LEADERSHIP ISSUES POLICY FRAMEWORK TO GUIDE ACTIONS IN 117TH CONGRESS

On January 11, Ways and Means Chairman Richard Neal (D-MA) released a legislative framework for how the Committee will "address the role that racism, ableism, and other social, structural, and political determinants have in perpetuating health and economic inequity in the United States." As one of the major committees in Congress, Ways and Means has jurisdiction over a wide spectrum of policies ranging from workforce, business and health care tax incentives to Social Security to economic stimulus initiatives. Based on a Committee [report](#) titled "Something Must Change: Inequities in U.S. Policy and Society," the [framework](#) lays out policy priorities to steer the Committee's work in the 117th Congress.

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While the framework by its nature is broad and general in its outline of policies, it does touch on a number of issues of interest to PVA and its members. Among these are:

- Ensure technological advancements do not leave underserved communities behind by supporting efforts to
  - revisit the role of algorithms in clinical decision tools that rely on race, ethnicity, or other non-medical factors in assessing patients and systemic bias vulnerabilities related to the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in health payment and delivery
  - accommodate needs for assistive technologies and telehealth for individuals living with disabilities;
- Increase accessibility and reasonable accommodations within health care facilities so people with disabilities have better access to diagnostics, care, and treatment;
- Extend the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, which provides financial support for businesses that hire workers who are disproportionately likely to have difficulty finding a place in the workforce;
- Provide job services and supports targeted to vulnerable populations and focused on long-term career advancement, not just employment;
- Strengthen and improve Social Security benefits, particularly for low-wage workers; and
- Protect Social Security disability benefits from harmful regulations and other attacks designed to reduce access to benefits.

## NEWS ITEMS OF NOTE

- VA Pauses Debt Collection Efforts Again

On January 22, President Biden resumed the pause on debt collection activity by VA. It is unclear which debts will be paused under this order. If you have questions about how this impacts a debt you may have with VA, we encourage you to reach out to one of our PVA national service officers or you can contact the VA debt management center through their new tool, [www.va.gov/manage-va-debt/](http://www.va.gov/manage-va-debt/) or by calling 1-800-827-0648.

- DOT Publishes Draft Strategic Plan on Accessible Transportation

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) has published a draft of its first Strategic Plan on Accessible Transportation. The plan represents an effort to make America's transportation system more accessible for all travelers and will guide DOT's efforts in fiscal years 2021-2025. The draft is [available for public review and comment](#) through February 16 at 5:00 p.m. ET.

- RAND Corporation Issues Report on Family Caregivers and COVID

RAND Corporation has published a [report](#) titled, "The Coronavirus Pandemic Highlights Why Family Caregivers Need to Be Integrated into the Health Care Team and Shows Us How to Make It Happen." The authors describe why, in light of COVID-19, it is more critical than ever to integrate family caregivers into patients' health care teams and highlight several solutions for accomplishing this goal.

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## SURVEYS

- PVA Member Survey on COVID Vaccine

PVA wants to know what vaccine offerings and experiences are like in your community. Please take two minutes to complete our survey online. The survey can be found here: [Understanding PVA Member Access to COVID-19 Vaccine](#). This survey, which is completely voluntary, will give us an overview of the problems and concerns members face as the vaccine continues to roll out.

- Wheelchair Accessibility in Ridesharing Through Uber and Lyft Services

Virginia Tech has released a survey to develop a greater understanding for accessibility of rides, through mobile apps like Uber and Lyft, from the perspective of people who use wheelchairs or scooters. Eligible participants for this survey should use or have used a wheelchair or scooter in the past, for occasional or full-time use and live anywhere in the United States. If participants do not have direct experience using Uber or Lyft, Virginia Tech is still interested in perceptions of using ridesharing services. Please take the [survey](#) now as it will close soon.