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May 2008

The Advocacy Bulletin

A publication of the Mtn. States Chapter
Paralyzed Veterans of America

Inside this issue:

- PVA's positions on veteran benefits legislation
- ADA Restoration ACT
- New Plans for Denver VAMC

San Juan Mountains, Colorado

UPCOMING EVENTS...

PVA Pizza Party

June 11 - 12:00 PM

Denver VA Medical Center
Floor 5 South

PVA Poker League

June 18 - 5:00 PM

Mt. States Chapter
12200 E. Iliff Ave, Ste. 107
Aurora, CO 80014

Colorado Jr. Wheelchair Sports Camp

June 9 - 13

Gateway High School
Aurora, CO

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NATIONAL UPDATE

Senate VA Committee Conducts Hearing on Benefits Legislation

On May 7, the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs held a hearing on pending veteran benefits legislation. One of the primary issues discussed in the hearing was updating GI Bill education benefits. Sen. Jim Webb (D-VA) introduced S. 22, the "Post-9/11 Veterans Education Assistance Act," last year. **PVA fully supports this legislation** because it would enhance current educational benefits for the men and women who have served on active duty since Sept. 11, 2001, by returning the GI Bill to the level established following World War II. Meanwhile, Sen. Graham (R-SC), Sen. Burr (R-NC), and Sen. McCain (R-AZ) have introduced S. 2938, the "Enhancement of Recruitment, Retention, and Readjustment Through Education Act". **PVA opposes this legislation** because we fundamentally disagree with the notion inherent in this legislation that realigning the GI Bill with the post-World War II benefits would negatively affect retention.

The other major bill discussed during the hearing was S. 2674, the "America's Wounded Warriors Act." This bill was introduced in attempt to advance concepts outlined in the Dole-Shalala Commission, which **PVA adamantly opposes**. PVA believes the most incomprehensible provision of this legislation is the requirement for the VA to reevaluate veterans on an as determined basis. This reevaluation process essentially eliminates any protections veterans may have as it relates to the long-term status of their disability. PVA will continue to work with the committee to ensure that meaningful legislation that will best benefit veterans is approved.



ADA Restoration Act

The disability community continues to work with Congress and business organizations to reach an agreement on restoring the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Proposed language the groups are working with is significantly different from current legislation (S. 1881/H.R. 3195) that simply prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability. This new proposal makes clear that mitigating measures, e.g., medication, assistive devices, are not to be considered in determining whether an individual has a disability, and that episodic conditions are to be considered as if the condition is active. This proposed language is at the state where it should move forward if both communities approve it. PVA has signed on as supporters of the proposed compromise.

ADA Symposium

In mid-May, I attended the National ADA Symposium in St. Louis, MO, along with eight other PVA chapter government relations directors. Attendees discussed ADA issues regarding employment, architecture, state and local government, the role of ADA coordinators, and community issues. A priority for the Chapter is to ensure that our members are aware of ADA guidelines, communities are accessible to all citizens, and that local governments are understanding of the needs of people with disabilities.

**Disclaimer:*

All information contained in this bulletin is taken from publicly available media and information sources.

REGIONAL UPDATE

Another New Plan for Denver's VA Replacement Facility

In late April, MSCPVA was shocked and dismayed over the newly proposed plans for Denver's VA replacement facility that is to be built on the Fitzsimons/Anschutz medical campus. Specifically, it was upsetting to learn that the expected, and much needed, Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) Center is no longer in the plans.

The original plans developed over the last few years between the Eastern Colorado Health Care System (ECHCS) and the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) included a comprehensive, 30 bed SCI Center. However, the newly proposed plans has eliminated the SCI Center and reduced it to an 8 bed SCI Inpatient Clinic and Outpatient Program.

Veterans with spinal cord injury or dysfunction (SCI/D) require specialty care services due to their medical condition(s) and often have to travel great distances (e.g. Albuquerque, NM; Long Beach, CA; Seattle, WA) to receive that medical care. MSCPVA is greatly concerned that the proposed changes will further diminish the high level of specialty care services desperately needed in this region. Currently, VISN 19 is the largest geographic VISN in the adjoining 48 states, yet it does not have a SCI Center for the hundreds of SCI/D veterans who reside here.

Therefore, eliminating the SCI Center from Denver's VA replacement facility will be a disservice to hundreds of veterans in this region. While efforts to move some services to outlying areas to meet localized veteran need is commendable, it does not support the elimination of a new, tertiary care replacement facility in Denver to meet the complex needs of VISN 19 veterans.

Another critical issue is the proposed "hospital within a hospital" concept. MSCPVA was displeased to discover that in result to the nature of the shared facility, national service officers will no longer be able to effectively advocate for veterans' benefits and medical needs.

This project is of vital importance to PVA and the Mtn. States Chapter. To that end, MSCPVA urges the VA to utilize the original Project Eagle plans previously sanctioned by PVA to guarantee that all veterans in this region are being fully cared for.

One Step Closer to a New VA Cemetery in Southern Colorado

MSCPVA commends the Colorado Congressional delegation, with Rep. John Salazar's (D-CO) leadership, for the successful passage of H.R. 1660. Passage of this bill confirms the vital need for a veterans' cemetery in the southern region of Colorado. MSCPVA urges Senators Salazar (D-CO) and Allard (R-CO) to take the initiative and secure successful passage in the Senate.



If you would like further information on issues presented in this Bulletin, please contact me at lholman@mscpva.org. This bulletin is also available on the Advocacy page of our website at www.mscpva.org.

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[We're on the web!
www.mscpva.org **]**

The Mountain States Chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America (MSCPVA) is a Congressionally chartered, veterans' service organization specializing in assisting and promoting a full lifestyle for veterans affected by spinal cord injury or dysfunction. The Paralyzed Veterans of America was formed in 1946. MSCPVA is one of 34 chapters, which received its charter in 1955, and has continuously strived to service its members located in the Rocky Mtn. region of Colorado, Montana, Utah and Wyoming.

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