



ADVOCACY BULLETIN

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International Day of Persons with Disabilities

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On December 3, 2011 the international community celebrated the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. The theme for the 2011 day was “Together for a better world for all: Including persons with disabilities in development.” The theme is meant to solidify the importance of including persons with disabilities in the development process from policy development to fund allocation. According to the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, “More and more countries are committing to protecting and promoting the rights of persons with disabilities. However, many challenges remain. Persons with disabilities experience higher rates of poverty and deprivation and are twice as likely to lack health care. Employment rates of persons with disabilities in some countries are as low as one-third of that of the overall population. In developing countries, the gap in primary school attendance rates between children with disabilities and others ranges from 10 per cent to 60 per cent.”

Featured Organization of the Bulletin: Freedom Service Dogs

For 25 years, Freedom Service Dogs (FSD) has been enhancing the lives of people with disabilities. All of the dogs we use are rescues, almost entirely from shelters across the Metro Denver area and the Front Range. Any dog that does not fulfill all the comprehensive training requirements is found an adoptive home. Our success has been vast, but at any given point we have upwards of 45 people on a waiting list who struggle for, on average, more than a year as we seek funding to provide a service dog to suit their specialized needs. For the past few years, FSD has partnered with the United States Veterans Administration to develop Operation Freedom. This program is designed to help returning war veterans and military personnel through their transition from active duty and combat to civilian life. Through Operation Freedom, service members and veterans are placed with highly specialized service dogs that help them find a new level of independence in their post-combat life. Many returning military personnel and veterans face a myriad of challenges including PTSD, depression, immobility and inactivity. Freedom Service Dogs is proud to rescue, train and provide service dogs to our nation’s disabled veterans who suffer from these disabilities.



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Interview with Senator Bennet

The following interview was done with Senator Bennet from Colorado and reflects his opinions about veterans issues. The Mountain States Chapter of Paralyzed Veterans of America will seek the opinions of leaders from various political backgrounds and persuasions and does not endorse any candidate or political affiliation.

1. Q -What prompted you to develop the veterans' resource page on your website? *

A- America's veterans have fought bravely to defend our country, and they should not have to fight for a good-paying job or the benefits they've earned when they leave the service or come home. We created this page to connect veterans to job and educational opportunities and provide them with up-to-date information on resources available to them and their families.

2. Q - What are some of the major gaps in services for veterans, and how can we all get involved to eliminate those gaps?

A- There are thousands of public and private programs meant to help connect veterans with job and educational opportunities, housing assistance, and mental health services. However, critical gaps in these services remain because those working for veterans are often not effectively communicating with each other and because it is often difficult for veterans to pinpoint which of the multitude of service providers is most relevant to their needs and accessible to them geographically. This country needs a central place where public and private organizations committed to serving veterans can go to learn about each other and work together and where veterans can go to connect to the services they need. We, as Americans, should also look for opportunities to assist our veterans in their transition to civilian life and work together to fulfill our obligation to those who have worn the uniform.

3. Q - What can you do as a Senator to address the high suicide rate among veterans?

A- The loss of a single veteran to suicide is a tragedy, and the ongoing suicide rate among returning veterans must be addressed. A key element to addressing this problem centers on getting information and help to veterans in crisis. There are services available, but we must work to reduce red tape, to get help to vets quickly. We must also work to provide veteran benefits in a more timely manner. Far too many veterans file disability claims and then wait for months, if not years, to hear back from the VA. We must work to make sure the VA has the proper staff and resources to ensure that a veteran does not feel that suicide is his only option.

4. Q - Are there any policies you can develop at the federal level to address the barriers that returning veterans face?

A- I recently received a report from a group of veterans from around the state, and from a number of veteran organizations, which was the result of a series of roundtables I held with veterans over recent months. This report identifies over 30 proposed solutions to a variety of current problems in the veterans community. My office is working hard with a number of veterans and veterans service organizations to help prioritize and implement these solutions. We are working hard on this process every day.

* Senator Bennet's veterans' resource page can be found at: <http://bennet.senate.gov/services/casework/>

MS and Alternative Therapies

Those with MS may seek alternative therapies or treatments to manage their symptoms. MS patients are increasingly able to find relief from symptoms with the use of meditation, yoga, tai chi, vitamin supplements (specifically vitamin D), biofeedback, guided imagery, therapeutic horseback riding, massage, and acupuncture.

However, access to these alternative forms of treatment is not easy given the expense of the treatments and the fact that insurance companies rarely cover the costs of such treatments. While research is still being conducted to gain a comprehensive understanding of alternative treatments, there is significant evidence that treatments are effective. However, because alternative therapies are not considered mainstream and taught in medical schools, insurance companies defer the cost. Increasing access to therapies that work for MS patients, whether mainstream or not, would mark significant progress for those suffering with the symptoms of MS.

State Legislators Convene

The **Colorado General Assembly** will convene on January 11, 2012 and will adjourn on May 9, 2012. For more information about the Colorado General Assembly go to: <http://www.leg.state.co.us/>

The **Wyoming Legislature** will not convene again until January 8, 2013. The Wyoming Legislature's general session convenes every 2 years. For more information about the Wyoming Legislature go to: <http://legisweb.state.wy.us/lsoweb/>

The 63rd session of the **Montana Legislature** will not convene again until Monday, January 7, 2013. The general session of the Montana legislature meets every other year. For more information about the 2013 regular session go to: <http://leg.mt.gov/css/sessions/63rd/default.asp>

The **Utah Legislature** meets every year and will convene on January 23, 2012 and adjourn on March 18, 2012. For more information about the Utah Legislature go to: <http://le.utah.gov/>



The Paralyzed Veterans of America is a congressionally chartered veterans' service organization formed in 1946, which specializes in assisting and promoting a full lifestyle for veterans affected by spinal cord injury or disease.

The Mountain States Chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America (MSCPVA) is one of 34 chapters and serves members in the Rocky Mountain region of Colorado, Montana, Wyoming and Utah.



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