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February 2008

The Advocacy Bulletin

A publication of the Mountain States Chapter
Paralyzed Veterans of America

Inside this issue:

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- PVA testifies on FY09 budget and SCI Voc Rehab Program
- VA clinic approved to open in Havre, MT

UPCOMING EVENTS...

*Join us for the 2010 National Veterans Wheelchair Games
Kick-off Party*

March 27 from 10:00 am - 3:00 pm
Denver VA Medical Center
Auditorium

VA pizza party

March 19 at 12:00 noon

VA ice-cream social

March 29 at 2:00 pm

Hosted for patients on
Floor 5 South

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★ *MSCPVA Member is Featured in National PSA Commercial*

Army Staff Sgt. Matthew Keil joined MSCPVA in September 2007. On February 24, 2007, he was shot in the neck by an Iraqi sniper, which left him paralyzed. His attitude remains positive and he said, "Despite my injury, I refuse to sulk. I will remain active and advocate for wounded soldiers." He and his wife, Tracy Keil, were recently filmed by PVA for a national public service announcement that focuses on his experience and recovery at Craig Hospital. The Keils have also been interviewed by WBN2 news and 9 News, which focused on the new home being built for the them in Parker, CO through Homes for Our Troops and volunteers. For more information, please contact our Chapter.

NATIONAL UPDATE

PVA Testifies Before House VA Committee on the FY09 Budget

On February 7th, Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) testified before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs concerning the Dept. of Veterans Affairs (VA) budget request for FY 09. PVA, along with the other co-authors of *The Independent Budget (IB)*, offered views on the four primary components of the VA budget - health care, benefits, construction, and memorial affairs.

Chairman Bob Filner (D-CA) emphasized that the IB provides the blueprint for what Congress should seek to achieve in its funding for the VA. PVA testified that the Administration's budget is a step forward but still falls short of the recommendations of the IB. The main concern is that the number of OEF/OIF veterans who will seek care in the VA is seriously underestimated. PVA is also disappointed that the Administration chose to once again recommend an increase in prescription drug co-payments from \$8 to \$15. The VA itself has previously said that the impact of these increases could drive away as many as one million veterans from using the system.

Finally, the President's proposed budget decreases the amount of funding for both major and minor construction compared to FY08. This is especially a concern for MSCPVA since the Denver VA is in the initial stages of building a new medical center on the Fitzsimons campus and does not want the project to be put on hold.

PVA Testifies About SCIVocational Rehabilitation & Employment Program

In February, PVA also testified before the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs on the importance of the Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment Program (VR&E). The primary mission of the VR&E program is to provide veterans with service-connected disabilities all the necessary services and needed assistance to achieve maximum independence in daily living and to the maximum extent feasible, to become obtain and maintain employment.

The Independent Living (IL) Program is a VR&E program that many PVA members, as well as other veterans with SCI, have benefited from. The concern remains that VR&E is still forced to abide by an arbitrary cap of 2,500 new cases each year. Recently, PVA has directed some of its organizational efforts to assist veterans with severe disabilities to achieve employment goals and eventually to improve the employment rate of its members. It is important to introduce the idea of employment and setting vocational goals early on in the medical rehabilitation process.

REGIONAL UPDATE

Department of Veterans Affairs Agrees to Open a Clinic in Havre, MT

After tireless efforts of a local veteran, the Department of Veterans Affairs has agreed to open a new Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Havre, MT. The CBOC will provide primary and specialty care to approximately 2,800 veterans living in the Blaine, Chouteau, Liberty and Hill county area. Expected to be open by mid-summer, it will be the 12th CBOC in the state and will complement the regional healthcare facility at Fort Harrison in Helena. We applaud Representative Dennis Rehberg and Senators Max Baucus and Jon Tester for helping to ensure the opening of this clinic.

Wyoming Legislature - 2008 Session Convened on February 11

The following pieces of legislation have been introduced that relate to veterans and/or disability issues. MSCPVA will work with the legislature for successful passage of these bills.

- H.B. 6, State Veterans Museum
- H.B. 12, Veterans' Mental Health Appropriations
- H.B. 33, Veteran's Property Tax Exemption
- H.B. 154, Tax Refund to Elderly and Disabled

Colorado Legislature Celebrates Military and Veterans Appreciation Day

On February 13, the Colorado General Assembly came together to express their gratitude to our state's more than 426,000 military veterans and their families. Several Representatives and Senators stood up and spoke about personal experiences, recognized their constituents, and commended our past and present service members. MSCPVA was pleased to participate in this year's event. It was a memorable day honoring those who have fought to protect the security and peace of our nation and other nations.



Assistance Available for Your Veteran Constituency

If your offices are contacted by constituents who are veterans suffering from spinal cord injury and/or disease, PVA has the following individuals available to assist with their needs:

Robert Hager
National Service Officer
(303)914-5590

Nicholas Orchowski
National Service Officer
(303)914-5590

Ronald Parmalee
MT Field Representative
(406)442-2973

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 Local Legislative News page of our website at www.mscpva.org.

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

Laura J. Holman, Government Relations Director



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The Mt. 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 neurological disease. 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 Mountain region of Colorado, Montana, Utah and Wyoming.