

A close-up, low-angle photograph of an American flag waving. The flag is the central focus, with its red and white stripes and blue field with white stars clearly visible. The flag is attached to a wooden flagpole, which is partially visible at the top center. The background is a bright, slightly blurred outdoor setting, possibly a lawn or field. The overall tone is patriotic and celebratory.

Gateway **azette**

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VETERANS WITH SPINAL CORD INJURY OR DISEASE, LIVING LIFE TO THE FULLEST

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Kansas City, MO 64128
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Fax: (816) 922-3369

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St. Louis Service Office

9700 Page Blvd. Suite 101, Room 1-114
St. Louis, MO 63132
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Fax: (314) 253-4170

Vacant, National Service Officer
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Jefferson Barracks VA Medical Center

JB SCI, Room 2S25
#1 Jefferson Barracks Drive
St. Louis, MO 63125
Office: (314) 894-6467 or (866) 328-2670
Fax: (314) 894-6465
Rodney Harris, Senior Benefits Advocate



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Stanley D. Brown

Gateway Strives to Take Care of Its Members

In my National Director's report in this newsletter, I talked about a resolution we submitted that passed concerning Chapters spending on their membership. In essence, the new standard/requirement is that a PVA Chapter must spend at least an amount equal to the PVA Chapter contribution of \$142,729.56 on programs for its members during the fiscal year. Gateway last year spent \$591,517 on programs and membership and so far this year with two weeks to go in the fiscal year, we have spent \$526,939 on member programs. As I read the audits from the other Chapters, I'm convinced we spend more on our members than any other Chapter. Don't get me wrong, I'm not complaining, our spending on members is a good thing. We have now opened the generator grants (\$5500) to be a year-round grant, just like the home accessibility grants (\$10,000 for nonservice connected members and \$7500 for service connected members) and the vehicle hand controls grant of up to \$3,500 per member. We have been providing the vehicle grants once a year and just completed awarding a total of \$165,000, up from the total vehicle grants of \$110,000 during the last fiscal year. The accessible vehicle grants this fiscal year included three (3) grants of \$35,000 each for members who did not own an accessible vehicle and six (6) grants of \$10,000 each for members who currently had a vehicle in need of repairs or who could trade the vehicle and use the grant to purchase a different accessible vehicle.

Gateway will be only spending around \$3000 for three of our members going to the National Veterans Wheelchair Games this year in the Big Apple because of COVID19 concerns by participating

member-athletes. Earlier in the year, we provided two rounds of gift cards to our members to help deal with COVID19 related issues like groceries and meals. In sum, we distributed \$6,900 in two rounds of gift cards. If members have other ideas or suggestions concerning what the Chapter could be doing for you, please contact me or a Board Member.

Board Elections

Following the Chapter bylaws, Gateway conducted a mail ballot recently for its officers and Board of Directors. The elected officers for one year term and Board of Directors can be found on the page to the left.

The VA and COVID

Our Senior Benefits Advocate, Rodney Harris, and I met virtually with St. Louis VA management Friday, June 18, 2021. Rodney and I continued questioning on when the six-bed acute SCI care at John Cochran will again be open for us. It had been used for COVID19 patients only during the pandemic. We are told it has now been converted back to "regular use" but is not being used for SCI patients. Meanwhile, Jefferson Barracks SCI is limited to 20 patients in individual rooms. VA management somewhat reluctantly admitted that we have members still in their homes or other facilities that should be in the hospital if there were beds available. Rodney and I pressed management to open the Cochran unit and move our members accordingly so they can receive VA care from SCI trained nurses and staff.

Still no definitive word on when things will be "back to normal," meaning the buildings would be open to normal visitation. The SCI clinic at Jefferson Barracks, including physical and occupational therapy, will see outpatients

by appointment only at this time. Recreation therapy is working with people at the new VA pool by appointment. We are hoping the bowling alley will open soon so that the bowling event can be done locally by our membership competing virtually in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games.

I specifically asked the VA management if there were any plans to offer us a vaccination booster, especially because of the latest virus Delta mutation. We were told both the Pfizer and Moderna are good for at least 12 months and there is no VA guidance saying those vaccines don't protect us from the various virus mutations. If we hear anything different, I will keep you informed. And speaking of vaccinations, has everyone over 50 received the latest two shingles shots? How about the five year, I believe, bacterial pneumonia shot? And I am seeing on TV, spots about a meningitis vaccine. I don't know about that but would encourage you to ask your VA liaison about that vaccination.

Need for Emails-Remaining Baseball Tickets and Gateway Bus Rides

I've made this plea before, but if we don't have your email we can't reach you for last-minute benefits or programs we are offering. For instance, we still have some Cardinals games available and will email that list out shortly. We are also considering running our bus again, taking members to various places. If you're interested and have been vaccinated like our drivers, please respond to the email or this newsletter by contacting the office and expressing your interest.

Pictured above is Cindy Lechner receiving PVA plaque for 34 years of service to us.

FROM THE DESK OF GATEWAY CHAPTER'S **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

SPORTS POINTS GIFT CARDS

We have reached the end of the fiscal year and it is time to redeem your accumulated Sports Points for gift cards of your choosing. Gift card usage will be awarded at \$1 per point earned, up to \$300 annually and only awarded in a non-cash distribution such as gift cards or event tickets and you must have accumulated a minimum of 25 points to receive a gift card. All points to be used for gift cards must be redeemed by August 31 of this year. Please call or email Amber or myself to determine your sports points accumulation this year and to let us know what type(s) of gift cards and the amounts to be applied to each type of card.

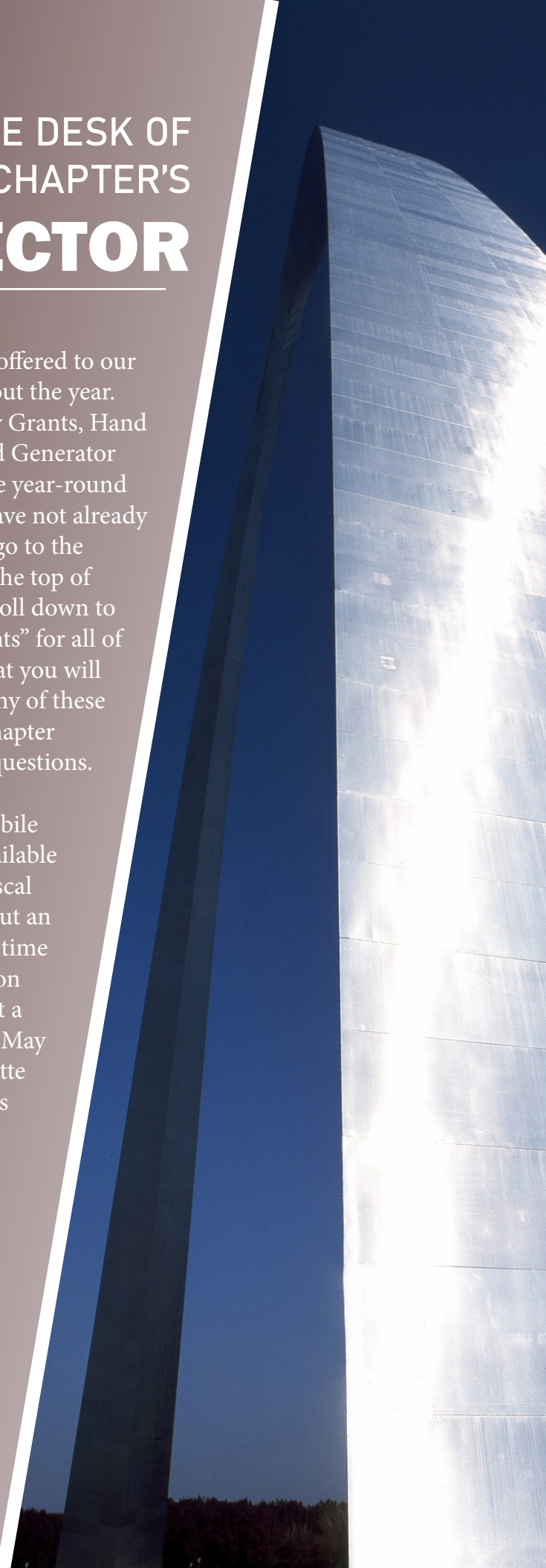
If you want to redeem your points for a Visa gift card, 5 points (\$5) will be deducted from you total to pay for the activation fee. Remember that if you have used or plan to use your sports points for athletic events such as the Winter Sports Clinic, National Veterans Wheelchair Games, Trout Lodge or any other event, you may not use your remaining sports points for gift cards.

MEMBERSHIP GRANTS

Please see our website at www.gatewaypva.org to learn more about

the grants that are offered to our members throughout the year. Home Accessibility Grants, Hand Control Grants and Generator Grants are available year-round to members that have not already used them. Please go to the "Programs" tab at the top of the website and scroll down to "Membership Grants" for all of the information that you will need to apply for any of these grants. Call the Chapter Office if you have questions.

Accessible Automobile Grants are only available at the end of our fiscal year and we send out an email detailing the time frame for application submission and put a notice in the April/May edition of the Gazette to remind members of the process. The Chapter awarded nine accessible automobile grants at the June 1, 2021 Board of Directors meeting to assist members with becoming more independent.



SUMMERTIME BLUES

by Rodney Harris, Senior Benefits Advocate

When summer rolls around the relief from the “Winter Blues” is sometimes replaced by “Summertime Blues.” With the change in the weather it brings about different issues that can cause people to dread the heat and humidity of the Midwest and become depressed and isolated from friends and family. This is referred to as a Reverse Seasonal Affective Disorder or (SAD). Symptoms of Reverse (SAD) include feelings of hopelessness, irritability, loss of interest in activities, insomnia, decreased appetite and weight gain or loss.

During the summer, there are additional factors that may contribute to Reverse SAD such as:

- Changes in regular schedules as children are out of school, routines are varied, and there are disruptions in eating and sleeping patterns
- Because of the heat, people wear less clothes which can lead to body image issues
- Summer activities including camp and vacations can lead to increased financial worries
- Isolation where people tend to stay indoors to beat the heat leading to decreased socialization
- Not meeting social expectations to relax and enjoy the summer

The causes of Summertime Blues are unclear but it is thought that the extra sunlight and higher temperatures affect serotonin and melatonin levels which regulate sleep and moods. This is more prevalent in the south where the days are longer but it can be a factor anywhere during the summer months due to how each of us react to the changes in the seasons.

Treatments for Reverse (SAD) can include antidepressant medications, melatonin, and Cognitive Behavior Therapy which can be quite effective.

Other helpful suggestions include exposing oneself for a few minutes to early morning sunlight, pushing yourself to go out and socialize, having consistent eating and sleeping routines, practicing meditation, yoga, and exercise, and remembering that Summertime Blues are temporary.

There are also other ways to deal with (SAD) such as:

- If you have SB, remember that it is temporary
- Plan ahead during spring so you will be prepared in the summer
- Be kind to yourself and don't compare how you feel in the summer to others
- Expose yourself to early morning sunlight for a few minutes

- Set and maintain a consistent routine to feel more in control of goings on around you
- Plan fun events and activities to look forward to
- Keep a consistent exercise routine and regular eating and sleeping patterns
- Don't isolate; push yourself to be around people and socialize
- If you are feeling overwhelmed, delegate tasks so you can have some “me” time
- Keep a journal of your feelings and experiences
- Pursue new interests or hobbies and volunteer for charitable work
- Practice yoga, meditation, and other relaxation activities
- Seek professional help to replace negative thoughts with positive ones

If you are feeling the lows of the summer remember to seek out treatment and remember that these symptoms are only temporary. Only you know your mind and body completely so when you are not feeling and acting like yourself ask for assistance from your VA psychologist or psychiatrist. Also reach out to your local PVA NSO for guidance to get the help you need to enjoy summer and not the blues (no knock to the St. Louis Blues). Parts of this article were taken from the Psychology Journal for reference and accuracy.

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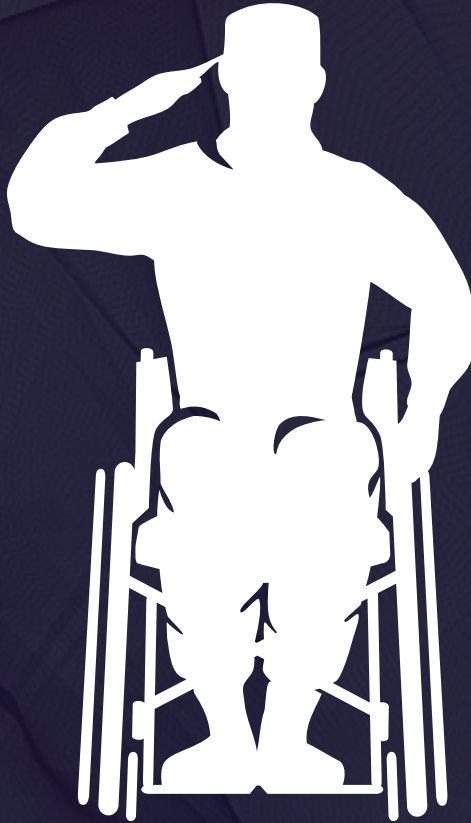


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GATEWAY G.I.

WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

Randal Baldwin
Steven Grubbs
Alpar Juhasz
Robert Morgan
Shane Newby
Jamie Patterson

MISSING IN ACTION

Have you seen or know the whereabouts of these members? They are in danger of being dropped from the PVA roster. Please contact the Gateway office with current contact information for the following members:

Ronnie Anderson
Amos Brown
Steven Cathey
Nelson Donovan
Jarid Hill
Kevin Jackson
Davett Jones
Robert Melchior
Jerold Reynolds
Joseph Roberts
Laurice Sappington
Willis Walker

IN MEMORY OF

Cecil Clark of Nixa, MO	11/01/20
Robert Kemper of Union, MO	03/22/21
Emmett Klump of Pocahontas, IL	03/25/21
Everett Banks of Alton, IL	04/02/21
Paul Dysart of Columbia, MO	04/24/21
Denzel Jines of Imperial, MO	05/02/21
Paul Barnick of Decatur, IL	05/05/21

GENERAL INFORMATION



JULY

JULY 2 to 5
OFFICE CLOSED

JULY 13 at 11:30am
Board of Directors meeting
Via Zoom - contact office for link
15 points for nonBOD members

JULY 23
Trout Lodge Applications DUE
Contact RTs Matt Luitjohan or Charley Wright



AUGUST

AUGUST 7 to 14
National Veterans Wheelchair Games

AUGUST 10 at 11:30am
Board of Directors meeting
Via Zoom - contact office for link
15 points for nonBOD members

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*Chun A, et al. Changes in bowel function following exoskeletal-assisted walking in persons with spinal cord injury: an observational pilot study. Spinal Cord. 2020;58(4):459-466.



by Stanley D. Brown

I just returned from our PVA 75th Anniversary Annual Convention in Sin City. It was indeed a “sin” we had a convention there at a renovated but still outdated, inaccessible hotel. The hotel and our meetings were in the renovated “old” section of Las Vegas called the “Freemont Street Experience.” If you think the new main strip of Las Vegas is a bit tacky, the Freemont Street Experience is tackier, if that is a word. All our meetings were in the hotel and we got our temperatures checked daily. I’m told by rumor that all but three of the 33 National Directors, myself included, had been vaccinated. I certainly wore a mask once I was outside of the meeting room. My last comment concerns the inaccessible hotel which did not have automatic doors, or sliding doors. I’m sure they were too heavy to meet ADA “pull” requirements. None of the rooms had beds that had frames that would accommodate a Hoyer lift. They ended up putting me in the “chairman’s apartment” which allegedly is where Frank Sinatra used to stay. We did have two bedrooms and a living room with a bar and piano. No ghost of Frank however. The last two nights we were entertained with the thumping sound of the techno band Deadmau5 which played until 1am in the park below us. We were issued ear plugs which helped somewhat, reminding me of days on the artillery range. But as a side note, business was conducted somewhat as usual and we have a new slate of officers.

President:
Charlie Brown, Florida Chapter

Sr. Vice President:
Robert Thomas, Buckeye Chapter

Vice President:
Hack Albertson, Kentucky/Indiana Chapter

Vice President:
Tammy Jones, Texas Chapter

Vice President:
Michael Negrete, New England Chapter

Vice President:
Josue Cordova, Vaughn Chapter

Treasurer:
Tom Wheaton, Mountain States Chapter

Secretary:
Marcus Murray, Kentucky/Indiana Chapter

There were 15 resolutions submitted, four were

from Gateway. Of perhaps general interest are the following resolutions:

1. 21-M-5 Guidelines for Chapters Receiving Gifts

I submitted the resolution because Gateway has experienced receiving donations to include vehicles and homes. We always gave our received donations by a lottery system. Some Chapters were awarding only two Board members. I detailed a fair procedure, but it was referred to a committee because unbeknownst to me, there was a committee already working on it.

2. 21-M-8 Reconstituting PVA Main Investment Reserve

The initial resolution said the PVA designated reserves should be \$60 million. The Better Business Bureau guidelines for charities says that charities should not have liquid reserves in excess of three times the charity’s operating budget. I submitted an amendment that said PVA should strive to have two times the previous year’s operating budget in their designated reserves. The amendment passed. For the last fiscal year that meant that PVA’s reserve should have been about \$200 million.

3. 21-M-11 Chapter Grant and Chapter Program Expenses

Gateway submitted this resolution which stated Chapters should be spending on their programs for members an amount at least equal to the PVA Chapter Contribution which is \$148,000 per year. Gateway has been spending in excess of \$500,000 annually on member programs. Chapters that do not spend the minimum amount will have their Chapter Contribution reduced by the difference. The resolution passed.

4. 21-M-12 Chapter Accumulation of Net Assets

The Better Business Bureau standard for charities is that a charity should not have at the end of the year disposable “liquid assets” like stocks, bonds, CDs and cash, that total more than three times what that charity spent on operating costs for the previous year. The principle is that the organizations that are 501(c)(3) charities should be spending their funds on their programs and not just accumulating assets. The resolution also said the difference between the disposable assets and three times the operating expenses, would be deducted from the Chapter Contribution for that Chapter. The resolution was submitted by Gateway and passed.

Jacqueline Black, PT, ATP

Hello! My name is Jackie Black, and I started in the position as SCI/D Therapy Supervisor and SCI/D Program Manager at the VHA St. Louis SCI/D Center in February of 2020. While my first year was very focused on our response to continually provide safe outreach to our veterans with SCI/D during the pandemic, I look forward to moving forward safely and focusing more energy on supporting our SCI/D rehabilitation team and programming.

Just to tell you a little more about myself, I am a St. Louis native. I am a physical therapist, graduated from Washington University St Louis Program in Physical Therapy in 1999, and I started my work at the VA in 2000 at JC. Most of my 21 years with the VA have been with St. Louis SCI/D Center. I have also worked for Denver VA Wheelchair Seating and Mobility Clinic and St Louis VA HBPC Program. It was a great experience to work with different teams in the VA system and learn about their wonderful programming. My favorite area of professional practice is SCI/D Rehabilitation, with a special interest in Wheelchair seating and mobility and Adapted Sports and Recreation. My favorite part of working for the VA is seeing how our veterans support one another through their

rehabilitation. You are truly inspiring to one another and those around you. It is an honor to be able to witness the camaraderie you provide for your fellow veterans. It truly is humbling, and I am grateful to be able to serve veterans in my daily work.

I am also proud that our VHA Healthcare System promotes a patient-centered approach to healthcare, which allow us to meet your unique needs and address things that are uniquely important to you. VHA also supports us in provided you a lifelong system of care with a focus on health and wellness. Most of us likely see this “Patient-Centered Care” as a current trend in all healthcare, but I have witness this in SCI/D since I came onboard in building 52 in 2002. I was fortunate to have Cindy Lechner, PT, mentor me in SCI/D rehabilitation. She recently retired in February 2021, and we certainly do miss her! She served all of her 34 years at St. Louis SCI/D Center.

I look forward to providing updates on behalf of our awesome team of SCI/D Occupational, Physical, and Recreational Therapists. If you have questions, concerns, or kudos- please contact me at Jacqueline.black@va.gov or 314-939-8711.

Stacy Duncan, MSW, LCSW

I wanted to share with you all that I have accepted another position at the VA with the Caregiver Support Program.

I started on SCI in May 2008 and considered this my “forever” position at the VA. SCI not only has phenomenal staff but also “marvel-like” vets. I say “marvel-like” as SCI vets work as part of the team with our new SCI vets to assist in overcoming what can seem so overwhelming in world that moves forward fast and furious whether one is ready or not. Our SCI vets don’t allow their life situations stop them from moving forward and being

involved with others when others need them the most. SCI is truly a team that includes the vets as the team.

It has been an honor to be apart of the SCI group. I have learned more appreciation, gratitude and community from my time on SCI than any other team I have worked with through my years as a social worker. I still plan to be involved as much as I can with SCI as allowed.

So see you soon!!!

PVA ACTION CENTER

by Heather Ansley, Associate Executive Director of Government Relations

Increasing Access to IVF

Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) and Representative Rick Larsen (D-WA) have introduced legislation, the Veteran Families Health Services Act, H.R. 2734 and S. 1280, aimed at improving assisted reproductive technology for servicemembers and veterans. This legislation would permanently authorize fertility treatment and counseling, including assisted reproductive technology like IVF, for veterans and servicemembers and allow for the use of donated gametes; ensure that veterans' and servicemembers' spouses, partners, and gestational surrogates are appropriately included in eligibility rules; provide support for servicemembers and veterans to navigate their options, find a provider that meets their needs, and ensure continuity of care after a permanent change of station or relocation; expand options for veterans with infertility by allowing VA to provide adoption assistance; and require VA and the Department of Defense to facilitate research on the long-term reproductive health needs of veterans. Helping catastrophically disabled veterans grow their families is an important PVA priority,

Strengthening Benefits for Catastrophically Disabled Veterans

Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) and Representative Daniel Meuser (R-PA) have introduced the AUTO for Veterans Act (H.R. 1361/S. 444), which would expand access to transportation for disabled veterans by allowing qualifying veterans to receive additional Automobile Grants. Both bills have wide bipartisan support. S. 444 was reviewed during a Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee legislative hearing in April. On May 19, Representative Lizzie Fletcher (D-TX) and House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Mark Takano (D-CA) introduced the Care Access Resources (CARS) for Vets Act (H.R. 3304). This

legislation would not only allow eligible service-connected veterans to receive an additional automobile grant if ten years have lapsed since their last grant, but would also codify the provision of certain vehicle modifications for veterans with non-service-connected qualifying conditions. More information about the CARS legislation is available [here](#). PVA supports both the CARS for Vets Act and the AUTO for Veterans Act.

Strengthening the Air Carrier Access Act

Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and Representative Jim Langevin (D-RI) have introduced the Air Carrier Access Amendments Act (ACAAA) (S. 642/H.R. 1696). This legislation would require airlines to meet access standards on aircraft, strengthen administrative enforcement, and create a private right of action for passengers with disabilities who face discrimination. With the availability of vaccines, more people with disabilities will be returning to the skies. Improving access to air travel remains a top priority.

Prioritizing Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities/Promoting Increased Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act

Senator Bob Casey (D-PA) and Representative Josh Harder have introduced the Disability Employment Incentive Act (S. 630/H.R. 3765). This bill would expand the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC), extend application of WOTC to SSDI beneficiaries, and increase the disabled access credit and the deduction for expenditures to remove architectural and transportation barriers to the disabled and elderly. PVA strongly supports this legislation as it would not only improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities, but it would also help businesses remove barriers to access for all.

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