



Paralyzed Veterans  
of America

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# Washington

## UPDATE

*Recent news regarding legislation and regulatory actions affecting veterans and people with disabilities.*

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**\*\*\*PRIORITY\*\*\***

The Government Relations staff is still looking for stories about problems that our members have experienced during air travel. Please visit [www.AirAccess30.org](http://www.AirAccess30.org) and share your story.

### **Presidential Campaigns Wrap-up Nominating Conventions**

The House and Senate recessed in mid-July to accommodate the Republican and Democratic National Conventions held over the last two weeks of July. The Republican National Convention (RNC) was held the first week after recess in Cleveland, OH. During the convention, Donald Trump and Mike Pence were formally nominated as the Republican candidates for the President and Vice President. The Democratic National Convention (DNC) was held the following week in Philadelphia, PA. During the DNC, Hillary Clinton and Senator Tim Kaine were formally nominated as the Democratic candidates for President and Vice President.

The conventions also included approval of the official party platforms for the Republican and Democratic parties. Both platforms recommit to America's sacred trust to veterans, they expound at length the heroic character of our service members, and regrettable consequences that befall them and their families. Where their similarities diverge is in each party's perception of primary problems and the corresponding plans to address them. The full RNC platform can be accessed at: <https://gop.com/platform/>. The full DNC platform can be accessed at: <https://www.demconvention.com/platform/>.

The RNC platform denounces the wait-time scandals concerning VA. In response to these controversies, Republicans seek accountability of senior leadership and fundamental changes to their structure. Regarding veterans' health care, Republicans will seek to consolidate VA's existing community care authorities to make a single program. In order to combat bureaucratic stagnancy, they encourage VA partnerships with private enterprises, VSOs and competitive bidding, predicting such work will allow for high quality VA care, reduce backlogs, and save resources. Additionally, Republicans will retain veterans' preference, support a broader range of options for health care, including faith-based programs to respond to the opioid crisis, and encourage private sector and public school hiring of veterans.



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The Democrats, equally enraged by VA scandals, propose fully resourcing VA to meet the needs of all veterans and reject attempts at privatization. The platform emphasizes the need for more education benefits and job training, preservation of the post-9/11 GI Bill, and fair treatment of reservists and Guard members. They recommit to ending chronic homelessness and suicide. Regarding veterans' health care, they emphasize veteran-centric care, resources for military sexual trauma (MST), the growth of mental health programs, treatment of invisible and toxic wounds and the expansion of the VA Caregiver Program to veterans of all eras. They seek to provide women with full and equal treatment, including reproductive health services. The DNC platform also proposes workplace policies that are more equitable for caregivers, as well as the expansion of a well-paid home care workforce and increased access to long-term care. They disfavor the deportation of immigrants who are veterans, while also highlighting the housing crisis for veterans in Indian Country.

The only identical policy proposal from both parties, aside from vaguely ensuring high quality health care and benefits for veterans (achieved differently), is a commitment to veterans treatment courts to prioritize rehabilitation over incarceration.

The respective platforms also offer views on some disability policy, albeit with slightly different inflections. The Republican platform highlighted the GOP's historic support of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the role of Republican leadership in the enactment of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), ABLE Act and the Steve Gleason Act. WIOA was the first major overhaul of the nation's workforce system in almost 20 years while the ABLE Act was a measure that lets people with disabilities maintain access to services while saving to develop assets. The Gleason law bears the name of former NFL player Steve Gleason who developed ALS. The law provides access to speech-generating devices. To encourage entrepreneurship, the platform endorsed opening the Small Business Administration's 8(a) certification program to people with disabilities, something that PVA has long supported. The platform continued the party's opposition to embryonic stem cell research and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Social Security was addressed largely from the perspective of reforms needed to the retirement system with Republicans calling for "all options," other than tax increases, to be considered for modernizing this important social insurance program.

The Democratic platform addressed a number of issues important to individuals with disabilities including affirmation of support for the ADA and promises to expand access to appropriate accommodations and supports people with disabilities need to live in integrated community settings. The party endorsed policies that would bring to an end sub-minimum wage work, improve the lives of caregivers of people with disabilities, increase federal funding for affordable housing for low-income families, people with disabilities, veterans and the elderly, improve access to meaningful and gainful employment for people with disabilities and vowed to continue to fight for ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

In sections of the platform concerning restoration of the full protections of the Voting Rights Act (VRA), the Democrats highlight support for full funding of the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) to ensure that all registration materials, voting materials, polling places, and voting machines are fully accessible to seniors and Americans with disabilities. With regard to Social Security, the platform opposes efforts to cut or privatize the program or raise the retirement age and supports improvements to the cost-of-living formula that better reflects the fixed expenses of seniors and people with disabilities. The party also proposes measures to ensure the long term solvency of Social Security by asking those earning above \$250,000, a year to contribute more to the system and to provide sufficient financial support to the Social Security Administration to ensure it can provide timely benefits and high quality services to all beneficiaries.

Ultimately, the platforms only serve as a guide for the two parties during the course of the political campaigns with the goal to influence the policy positions of the major party candidates. However, the presidential candidates are not obligated to adopt the platform proposals. During next month's Washington Update, we will highlight the individual candidates' policies directed towards veterans and people with disabilities.

### **PVA Attends VA Joint Symposium: Safeguarding the Integrity of GI Bill Benefits**

On August 3, 2016, VA and the Deputy Under Secretary for Economic Opportunity, Curtis Coy, hosted a joint symposium to address VA's enforcement of its consumer protection authorities to protect veterans from dishonest schools. VA has faced considerable criticism for failing to take action against predatory for-profit colleges targeting veterans and service members. Current law calls for VA to cease distribution of federal funds when it finds that a school is employing aggressive, deceptive or fraudulent recruiting practices in order to get access to the lucrative GI Bill and Defense Department Tuition Assistance. So far, however, VA has taken relatively few enforcement steps despite numerous reports of deceptive behavior.

PVA and its VSO partners discussed the various legal authorities VA has at its disposal and advocated for greater enforcement efforts against such schools. We also encouraged VA to develop a support structure for veterans who have already been harmed by these schools or are otherwise forced to try and transfer into a different school to continue their education.

### **PVA Conducts Survey to Support Access Committee Work**

In May, PVA was notified that Lee Page, Senior Associate Advocacy Director, was selected to be a member of the Access Advisory Committee on Accessible Air

Transportation overseen by the Department of Transportation (DOT). The Committee is comprised of representatives from the disability community as well as the airline industry. During its first meeting, the ACCESS Committee selected PVA to chair the workgroup evaluating the need for accessible lavatories on board aircraft.

In order to assist the ACCESS Committee, PVA recently conducted a survey/poll to disability stakeholders addressing seven questions that gauge their expectations for an accessible lavatory on a new single aisle aircraft. The poll was conducted over a three week period, with final results being collected on August 1, 2016. During that time period, 931 total respondents and 515 PVA members registered their opinions. We were particularly pleased with the response rate—8 percent—to the survey (industry standards consider 3 percent response rate to any survey to be good).

The overall results show that current lavatories are too small and more space is needed. The other significant take away was the lack of ability to get to the lavatory. Many respondents indicated that they were not aware of on board wheelchairs and had trouble getting the assistance needed to obtain them or their personal assistive devices. Additionally, airline personnel need more training in order to assist passengers throughout the process.

### **Review of AirAccess30.org Website**

With the [www.AirAccess30.org](http://www.AirAccess30.org) website now having been live for six months, we have analyzed visitor traffic on the site. In the first six months, there have been approximately 3,200 total visits to the website and approximately 2,700, unique visits. While visits to the website decreased during April and May, there was a significant increase in June and July. Some of this can be attributed to more awareness from PVA members as they traveled to our Annual Convention in May and to the significant number of athletes who traveled to the National Veterans' Wheelchair Games in June and July. Additionally, the time spent on the website during each visit increased significantly during June and July. The website currently includes 39 individual stories with additional stories that will be posted soon. We will continue to promote the website widely leading up to the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Air Carrier Access Act signing in October and carrying into the new Congress next year.

### **Election Assistance Commission Focused on Security for Elections**

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) was established by the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) in 2002. The EAC is an independent, bipartisan commission charged with developing guidance to meet HAVA requirements, adopting voluntary voting system guidelines, and serving as a national clearinghouse of information on election administration. The EAC is currently working with all levels of government to facilitate the conversation regarding securing the election process and to support election officials' efforts to provide an accessible and secure voting process.

Since the creation of its Voting System Testing and Certification Program, in partnership with the National Institute of Standards and Technology, the EAC has led in ensuring voting systems brought to the market have been vigorously tested against security standards. Voting systems certified by the EAC are not connected to the Internet.

Further, the EAC has worked with local and state election officials—as well as election stakeholders, from accessibility experts to scientists and academics—to ensure that best practices are shared nationwide. These best practices include pre-election testing, security, continuity planning, and post-election audits. Already this year, the EAC has conducted a series of events related to the #BeReady16 initiative, and more are underway and planned, including activities addressing Election Security Preparedness.

Voters are encouraged to get involved with their state and local election officials, and ask questions about their election process. The vast majority of election offices offer numerous opportunities for voters to engage in the process, including witnessing pre-election testing of the voting systems. Election officials welcome voters' questions and participation because they want voters to have confidence and to participate in the process.

The EAC also encourages voters to work at the polls as election workers. The election process benefits from full engagement from all people, and election administrators across the country are seeking election workers now for November. With 50 days before the deadline to mail ballots to military and overseas voters, the EAC is working with all stakeholders to lead discussions productively so that voters can have the utmost confidence in the election process.

For more questions about accessible voting, contact PVA Senior Associate Advocacy Director Lee Page.