



# Washington Update

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

Written and produced by Paralyzed Veterans of America - Government Relations Department

June 30, 2021

Volume 27, Number 11

## **Want to Follow the Status of Priority Issues Between Updates?**

Visit [PVA's VoterVoice Portal](#) to view our latest alerts and a list of key legislation and its status. You can also read a new [blog](#) providing an update on PVA's priorities.

### **VOTING RIGHTS DIES IN THE SENATE**

On June 22, Senate Republicans executed a filibuster to stop debate on election reform. H.R. 1, the For the People Act, is a measure that addresses voter access, election integrity, and campaign finance. Fourteen states have passed laws since the 2020 presidential election restricting voter access. The Senate voted to a 50-50 tie on a party line vote allowing the minority to stop the debate and for all intents and purposes "kill" the bill.

Vice President Kamala Harris who presided over the vote in the Senate said, "The right to vote is fundamental. It gives Americans a voice in what happens in our nation—whether that is in our economy or our national security, our education system or our healthcare system. When more people have a voice, our democracy becomes more representative, and our nation becomes stronger."

Although this version of H.R. 1 is dead, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) said this is not the end of the voting rights debate in this session of Congress. Democrats can go back and re-draft a new version and introduce a slimmed down version of H.R. 1 that takes into account the compromises Senator Joe Manchin (D-WV) worked on which included voter ID requirements.

Democrats can also pursue The John Lewis Voting Rights Reauthorization Act (VRA) (H.R. 4), which would restore the VRA's preclearance provision that was left inoperable by a 2013 U.S. Supreme Court decision. The preclearance provision as originally written in 1965 required certain states to notify the voting rights section of the Department of Justice (DOJ) of any changes that state legislatures or local municipalities were making in reference to access to voting. DOJ would preclear these changes to ensure non-discrimination.

### **Paralyzed Veterans of America**

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However, in 2013, the formula for determining which jurisdictions were subject to preclearance was found to be unconstitutional because it was out of date. Since the Supreme Court's decision, a number of states have passed restrictive voter suppression laws targeting certain populations making it harder for them to vote.

PVA will continue to follow this issue to ensure that the rights of people with disabilities in accessing the vote are strengthened and protected.

## HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE APPROVES VA SPENDING BILL

On June 25, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations approved on a voice vote the fiscal year 2022 VA funding bill. The bill provides a total of \$113.1 billion in discretionary appropriations for VA, an increase of \$8.7 billion above the 2021 enacted level and \$176.4 million above the President's budget request. More information about the bill's VA provisions are available [here](#). The full committee will hold a markup of the bill on **June 30 at 1:00 pm ET**. To view the markup, click [here](#).

## PACT ACT CLEARS HVAC

A comprehensive bill to address military-related toxic exposures was recently approved by the House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC). H.R. 3967, the [Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2021](#) or the Honoring our PACT Act was passed on a party line vote during a full Committee markup on June 24. The main sticking points of the bill are the cost and VA's capacity to implement the legislation. The version of the bill approved by the Committee will:

- Provide healthcare for potentially as many as 3.5 million veterans exposed to airborne hazards and burn pits;
- Streamline VA's review process;
- Concede exposure to airborne hazards and burn pits;
- Require medical exams and opinions for veterans with toxic exposure disability claims;
- Establish a presumption of service connection for 23 respiratory illnesses and cancers related to burn pits and airborne hazards exposure;
- Create a presumption of exposure to radiation;
- Expand Agent Orange exposure & add hypertension and MGUS to the list of presumptions;
- Require VA provide standardized training and conduct outreach; and
- Improve data collection between VA and the Department of Defense and commission studies.

Now, it awaits consideration by the House as a whole.

## SVAC EXAMINES VETERANS BILLS

On June 23, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC) held a hearing to examine 20 pending bills addressing a wide range of veterans-related issues. PVA submitted a statement for the record for the hearing. In our statement, we endorsed bills that would raise the age of eligibility for VA's Civilian Health and Medical Program (CHAMPVA) to age 26, direct VA to study the effects of cannabis on certain health conditions, improve maternity care provided

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through VA, and strengthen the Department's supply chain. We also expressed concerns with bills to provide service dogs to veterans with PTSD and codify VA health care access standards for community care which were required by the VA MISSION Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-182). A recording of the hearing is available [here](#).

## NEWS ITEMS OF NOTE

- SSI Restoration Act Introduced

PVA has endorsed legislation introduced on June 15 to address poverty among seniors and people with disabilities. Sponsored by Reps. Raul Grijalva (D-AZ), Elissa Slotkin (D-MI), and Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) in the House (H.R. 3763), along with 31 cosponsors, and in the Senate (S. 2065) by Senators Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), and Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), along with 15 other Senators, the bill aims to restore the original intent of the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program by updating outdated rules and modernizing a number of financial eligibility rules. A fact sheet from Justice in Aging is available [here](#).

- Know Your Social Security Act Introduced

PVA has endorsed legislation introduced on June 24 by House Ways and Means Social Security Subcommittee Chairman John B. Larson (D-CT) and Committee Member Vern Buchanan (R-FL) and Senate Finance Committee Chairman Ron Wyden (D-OR) and Senator Bill Cassidy (R-LA) to call on the Social Security Administration (SSA) to mail annual earnings and benefits statements to eligible workers. The Know Your Social Security Act, H.R. 4143, seeks to restore SSA's policy of providing Americans with critical information about the benefits they have earned through their payroll premiums. Since 2011, SSA has only mailed annual statements to a limited group of workers: those who are age 60 years or older, are not receiving Social Security benefits, and have not registered for an online account with SSA. More information can be found in this [release](#) from Chairman Larson.

- EEOC Issues Guidance on COVID-19, ADA, Rehab Act and Other EEO Laws

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has published an updated guidance on employment laws and the COVID-19 pandemic. The document can be found [here](#).

- New Site with Data on Rural Americans with Disabilities

The Montana Research and Training Center on Disability in Rural Communities has launched a [new website](#) providing a full state map series showing disability rates and other characteristics at the county level using five-year aggregate estimates made available by U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS) data for years 2013-2017.

- NCD Report on Accessible Medical Equipment Standards

Materials and recording from the National Council on Disability's (NCD) briefing on enforceable accessible medical equipment standards and people with mobility disabilities

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is now available. To view the briefing, please click [here](#). To read NCD's report, please click [here](#).

- Women Veterans Wanted for Million Veteran Program

Women veterans deserve a seat at the table in medical research. They want doctors who understand them better, with treatments and breakthroughs designed for their needs. By enrolling in the Million Veteran Program (MVP) you help ensure women are not left out of medical research that could potentially improve or save the lives of fellow women veterans. Enrollment is completely voluntary. Click [here](#) to learn more about the MVP and enroll today or call [1-866-441-6075](tel:1-866-441-6075).

## SURVEYS/HEARINGS/ WEBINARS/EVENTS

- Upcoming PVA Webinar

On **July 20** from **2:00-3:00 pm ET**, PVA Government Relations will host a webinar to provide information about VA's non-institutional long-term care programs, including how to get help in accessing programs, and an update on VA construction with a focus on new SCI/D long-term care facilities. The webinar will be recorded. To register, please click [here](#).

- National Women Veteran Needs Assessment

The University of Alabama is conducting a national survey of women veterans. We encourage all PVA women veterans to take and share the survey, which will help PVA learn more about your needs. You can access the survey [here](#). It will remain open until the **end of July**.

- Upcoming Veterans' Affairs Hearing

The House Veterans' Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Technology Modernization will hold a hearing on **July 1** at **10:30 am ET** entitled, "Review of the FY22 Veterans Affairs Information Technology Budget." To watch the hearing, please click [here](#).

- U.S. Access Board Webinar on Fitness Equipment

The U.S. Access Board will host the "Moving Forward: Access to Inclusive Fitness Equipment" event on **July 14** from **1:00 – 3:15 pm ET**. The virtual event will feature panel discussions on the importance and need for all people to have access to fitness equipment to increase strength, function, independence, and maintain a healthy lifestyle. It will feature presentations on the requisites for designing inclusive fitness equipment, the development of accessibility standards for fitness equipment, and implementation of accessible equipment. To register, please click [here](#).

- VA Meditation Classes

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VA is offering free, phone-based classes called ["Mindfulness Meditation"](#) to help veterans of all eras manage the challenges and stressors of everyday life. During each class, a topic related to mindfulness is introduced, followed by a guided meditation practice. Classes are available from **11 am-noon ET** on these upcoming days: **July 2, July 16, August 6, September 3, and September 17**. Click on the above link to join any of these classes.