Press Release

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Paralyzed Veterans of America Meets With President Trump, VA Secretary Shulkin and Fellow VSOs to Review Top Priorities for America’s Veterans

Trump reaffirms commitment to reform the Department of Veterans Affairs

WASHINGTON—Today Paralyzed Veterans of America (Paralyzed Veterans) joined fellow veterans service organizations and VA Secretary Shulkin for a first meeting with President Trump to discuss top priorities for the nation’s veterans.

This meeting comes on the heels of last week’s joint hearing of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees, or which Paralyzed Veterans testified and submitted written testimony* for the record. Of this morning’s meeting, Executive Director Sherman Gillums, Jr. issued the following statement:

“Paralyzed Veteran of America was gratified to participate in what we hope will be one of many collaborative meetings with President Trump and his Administration, as well as Secretary Shulkin. We entered the meeting with core questions about the future of VA healthcare--particularly specialized care, protections for veterans in within alternative community care without Congressional oversight, and in relation to important bills now moving in Congress. Coming out of the meeting, we believe that the President and his Administration are committed to improving the VA system of care and expanding choices for veterans seeking healthcare outside of the VA system. What’s more, we are optimistic that with further collaboration between his Administration and VA Secretary Shulkin, there is a new day dawning for the future of all healthcare for veterans that includes convenience, quality and adequate protections. We look forward to working on these points in the interest of our members.”

Specifics of Paralyzed Veterans of America meeting talking points included:

- **Healthcare** - Special populations of veterans, such as those with spinal cord injuries, traumatic brain injury, blindness, and severe mental health conditions have essentially been largely forgotten in the Veterans Choice Care debate. These veterans haven’t had many reliable alternatives for care in the community, which is why Paralyzed Veterans is pushing for more targeted and conscientious
expansion of community care access for veterans, particularly where VA hospitals that serve special populations are failing. Paralyzed Veterans is currently working with VA to explore what that looks like for our 18,000 members enrolled in VA health care.

- **Title 38 Protections, Healthcare** - It is vital that we ensure greater statutory protections for all veterans, standards of care that favorably compare to VA's best practices, reliable care coordination between VA and non-VA providers, and continued Congressional oversight (Title 38) so that veterans don't become mere commodities in private sector health markets with dollar signs on their foreheads.

- **VA Staffing** - Paralyzed Veterans also supports Congressionally-mandated bedding and staffing capacity reporting, which will ensure greater accountability within specialized care services, such as spinal cord injury, polytrauma, and blinded rehabilitation. Also, there have been longstanding problems with access to prosthetics (wheelchairs, patient lift systems, clothing grants, and home and auto adaptive equipment) due to ineffective and inconsistent policies, most of which are being developed without the input of stakeholders who feel the greatest impact poor policies. This problem may require a Choice Care-like solution for veterans who are tired of being underserved or denied access to life-essential prosthetics.

Additionally, the swamp draining needs to continue within VA, particularly at the mid-level management level, where it's become a safe haven for underperformers who command big titles and paychecks but have done very little to improve healthcare in the post-Phoenix VA era. Those salaries would better serve veterans if they were given to more clinicians who actually deliver bedside care. Paralyzed Veterans estimates the VA spinal cord injury service line needs about 1,000 more bedside nurses to meet currently unmet and future demand, and VA may be able to hire 3 or 4 nurses for every low performing senior executive they replace.
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- **Congressional Action on Veteran-centric Bills** - Our country needs to do better by those who suffer the hidden, accrued costs of battle. Caregivers for severely disabled veterans need more support, especially those providing daily, lifelong care to Pre-9/11 veterans. Also, survivors pay an ongoing price by being denied adequate benefits and being told if they remarry before age 57, they'll lose benefits. These "heroes on the homefront" need more than our tears, hugs, and sympathy. They need access to resources that provide economic empowerment, mental and physical wellness, and our sustained attention and support as the pain of their sacrifices continues.

To view this morning’s comments by President Trump and VA Secretary Shulkin, click [here](#).

*To request a copy of Paralyzed Veterans of America’s written testimony before Congress, please contact us. To view the oral testimony, click [here](#).*

**About Paralyzed Veterans of America:** Paralyzed Veterans of America is the only congressionally chartered veterans service organization dedicated solely for the benefit and representation of veterans with spinal cord injury or disease. For 70 years, we have ensured that veterans have received the benefits earned through their service to our nation; monitored their care in VA spinal cord injury units; and funded research and education in the search for a cure and improved care for individuals with paralysis.

As a partner for life, Paralyzed Veterans also develops training and career services, works to ensure accessibility in public buildings and spaces, provides health and rehabilitation opportunities through sports and recreation and advocates for veterans and all people with disabilities. With more than 70 offices and 34 chapters, Paralyzed Veterans serves veterans, their families and their caregivers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico (ParalyzedVeterans.org).

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