



# Out Front

## Michael G. Negrete, Chapter President

A lot has occurred this past month around the country and at the Chapter, and although the office remains closed, we are still extremely busy both maintaining the normal operational commitments of the Chapter and responding to the added demands of COVID-19, all while working remotely. Having put remote access capabilities and infrastructure in-place last year for our inclement winter weather put us well ahead of other larger organizations who had to scramble for remote solutions.

Still at the forefront of our COVID-19 legislative efforts is the array of “Critical Standards of Care” (CSC) throughout the New England states, most notably Massachusetts and Connecticut. One of the most shameful and inequitable policies is “saving the most life years over the most lives.” Simply put, at the time of triage under CSC, if your prognosis after treatment is less than 5 years, you’re prioritized at a lower level or not provided lifesaving treatment over someone who has a chance at a longer life span. We have partnered with a number of disability advocacy organizations to bring greater weight and a louder voice to this fight. To learn more about this and other legislative issues we’re currently focused on, I encourage you to contact Kristen McCone Gordon, our Chapter Government Relations Director. She continues to represent and work tirelessly on our behalf all across New England. We are fortunate to have her experience, talents and skills as part of our team.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, PVA’s Annual Convention in May was held via video-conference, instead of in-person in Dallas, TX. Despite being a virtual meeting, everything went quite well. I had the opportunity to address the Executive Committee and National Board of Directors, which I used to highlight the Chapter’s COVID-19 related legislative challenges and successes, our new Executive Director Mark Murphy’s diligent and fruitful grant funding efforts (No other Chapter has received more COVID-19 grant funding than New England!), and the creation of the COVID-19 Member Relief Grant. The Chapter was recognized a few different times for the tremendous financial improvements we have made over the past few years. Going from historically the worst to one of the best!

This coming July will mark the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA was an unprecedented piece of civil rights legislation signed into law on July 26, 1990, by President George H.W. Bush. The ADA worked to improve the inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of community life, including education, employment and government services. Having sustained my spinal cord injury in 2001, I have not had to experience the indignant hardships and discrimination of those who came before me and fought for our rights to simply be recognized and included as a person. I can’t fathom the multitude of challenges and the anguish having to live, to survive, through those times over 30 years ago. We owe advocates like Justin Dart, Ed Roberts and John Hessler a debt of gratitude for their tenacity and courage. Someone once asked how I prefer to be identified, either as “disabled or handicapped”? I said I prefer to “Michael”. Its a genuine honor and privilege to represent and advocate for my fellow service members as part of the New England Chapter and PVA as a whole.

And speaking of advocating, due to the grants we have received, the Board of Directors and I established the COVID-19 Member Relief Grant. The intention was to help those members financially impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. As I have always said “We’re here to help”. Please turn to page 6 to read complete grant details and how to apply for assistance.

As Independence Day approaches and we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Nation, I can’t help but reflect with a bit of melancholy considering the disparaging racial inequalities that have, and continue to, plague it. The United States has always been a beacon of liberty, hope and opportunity for all, not just some. It’s taken decades of challenging advocacy and legislation to move the equality needle for some. Milestones in our Nation’s efforts start early with the Bill of Rights, Abolition of Slavery, the 19th Amendment, the Civil Rights Act and marriage equality under the 14th Amendment. But it takes more than putting pen to paper to affect the intended measure of equality. It takes a heart-felt conscious decision by the people, individually, to make this change happen. Without this, the legislative victories have no more value than the simple paper they are written upon. Will the change needed start with you?

As I’ve frequently said, each of us has the individual capacity to make a positive impact in someone’s life. It doesn’t have to be something huge or time consuming. It could be a simple “Hello, how are you doing” as you pass by someone, a small \$10 donation or sharing a few minutes of your time with someone. Theodore Roosevelt said it best, “Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.”

Michael G. Negrete  
President and Paralyzed Veteran