ICBV Office Update

November 14, 2017

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**\*\*1** Calendar of Events

**November 16-18, 2017**

Mark your calendars for the **ICBV Fall Conference**

Location: Springfield’s President Abraham Lincoln Hotel. 217-544-8800. Mention that you are with Illinois Committee of Blind Vendors to get rate.

THURSDAY NOVEMBER 16

1:00-4:00 PM Subcommittee Meetings Locations TBA

FRIDAY NOVEMBER 17:

9:00-1:00 PM ICBV Board Meeting Abe Lincoln Hotel

1:00 PM \*\*\*TENTATIVE\*\* Van departs 53 W. Jackson –

Arrival Springfield 4:30 PM \*

5:30-7:00 Dinner on your own

6:00-7:00 Registration

7:00-9:00 PM ICBV Training Session 1: Agenda TBA

Giovanni Francese ICBV Training Chariman

Katy Ungaro ICBV Business Manager, Raven Pulliam BEP

Director, Donnie Anderson ICBV Chairman

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 18:

7:00-8:00 Registration

8:00-11:30 AM Training Session II Agenda TBA: Giovanni Francese, ICBV Training Chairman, Matt Cunningham BEP Director of Training and Personnel

12:00-1:00 PM LEADERSHIP AND AWARDS LUNCH

Mike Boldry, ICBV Awards Chairman, Matt Cunningham Director BEP Training and Personnel

Lunch menu

FLANK STEAK “FRITES” 24 hour house-marinated, gravy, potato wedges

**December 1, 2017 – checks in by November 23rd please**

**CHICAGO CHRISTMAS PARTY 2017**

When: Friday December 1, 2017 4:30 cocktails 5:00 Dinner

Where: Exchequer Pub 226 S. Wabash Chicago, IL 60604

Cost: $40

Come join I.A.B.M and I.C.B.V for its annual Christmas Party, Please send your checks in by November 23rd to I.A.B.M at 53 W. Jackson Blvd Suite 502 Chicago, IL 60604

Invite your family, friends, employees, Cook County Commissioners and let’s let the season dictate the fun. If you have questions call Giovanni 708.341.5785

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**\*\*2** **Cullen and Associates Session Update** – November 6, 2017

The Illinois General Assembly will convene the second week of fall Veto Session Tuesday, November 7th. During the first week of Veto Session, the House overrode 10 of the Governor’s vetoes of House bills, while the Senate overrode 4 of the Governor’s vetoes of Senate bills. Neither Chamber moved to accept the Governor’s specific recommendations for change outlined in the 8 amendatory veto messages pending before the General Assembly. The Illinois House failed in three attempts to override the Governor last week: SB 1905 (right to work), HB 3216 (3rd party state contracts), and HB 2622 (work comp state fund).

RECAP – FIRST WEEK OF VETO SESSION

Senate Veto Action:

The Illinois Senate voted 42-13 to override the Governor’s veto of SB 1905 (Silverstein/Moylan), which would ban local governments from setting up their own “right to work” zones. The Illinois House failed by one vote (70-72-1) to override the veto of that same measure. The bill remains in the House on the order of Total Vetoes, and the motion is likely to be reconsidered this week.

The Illinois Senate also voted 42-9 to override the Governor’s total veto of SB 419 (Link/Martwick), which rectifies a fire fighter pension issue. The bill now heads to the House for consideration.

The Illinois Senate voted 37-19-0 to override the Governor’s veto of SB 1351 (Biss/Guzzardi), which creates a student loan bill of rights specifically regarding the servicing of student loans. The bill would require loan servicing firms to task specialists with explaining repayment terms and debt management options to student borrowers. The bill now heads to the House for consideration.

The Illinois Senate voted 49-7-1 to override the Governor’s amendatory veto of SB 1462 (Holmes/Kifowit), which establishes the entrepreneur learner’s permit pilot program. The bill now heads to the House for consideration.

House Veto Action:

The Illinois House failed to override (65-50-1) the Governor’s veto of HB 2622 (Fine/Biss), which creates a state worker’s compensation fund.

The Illinois House also failed to override (67-47) the Governor’s veto of HB 3216 (Wallace /Manar), which requires third party contracts entered into by the state to be in the best interest of the State.

The Illinois House voted unanimously to override the Governor’s veto of the Debt Transparency Act, HB 3649 (Crespo/Manar). The bill requires all state agencies to report to the Comptroller the dollar amount of any bills that they receive and to indicate whether funding has been committed to pay off the obligations. The bill is an initiative of Comptroller Susana Mendoza. The bill now heads to the Senate for consideration.

The Illinois House voted 75-36 to override the Governor’s veto of HB 3419 (Andrade/Martinez), which prohibits the state from doing business with expatriate entities. The bill now heads to the Senate for consideration.

The Illinois House voted 86-29 to override the Governor’s veto of HB 688 (Zalewski/Cunningham), which allows firefighters to transfer credit to the Chicago fund in certain situations. The bill now heads to the Senate for consideration.

The Illinois House voted 71-40 to override the Governor’s Amendatory Veto of HB 302 (Martwick/Collins) which would require life insurers to search their records for unpaid death benefits dating back to 2000. The bill is an initiative of the State Treasurer. The bill now heads to the Senate for consideration.

The Illinois House voted 77-34 to override the Governor’s veto of HB 732 (D. Burke/Martinez), which limits new roofing work to licensed workers only. The bill now heads to the Senate for consideration.

The Illinois House voted 79-36 to override the Governor’s veto of HB 1797 (Davis/Trotter), which forgives the port authority’s repayment of a state loan. The bill now heads to the Senate for consideration.

The Illinois House voted 80-33 to override the Governor’s veto of HB 2462 (Moeller/Biss), which prohibits employers from asking for prior wage information during the hiring process. The bill now heads to the Senate for consideration.

The Illinois House voted 86-29 to override the Governor’s veto of HB 2778 (Willis/Jones), which addresses fire protection annexation. The bill now heads to the Senate for consideration.

The Illinois House voted 77-36 to override the Governor’s veto of HB 2977 (Welch/Lightford), which mandates the teaching of cursive writing in Illinois schools. The bill now heads to the Senate for consideration.

The Illinois House voted 73-41 to override the Governor’s veto of HB 3143 (Gabel/Hunter), which adds youth services organizations to the Prompt Pay Act. The bill now heads to the Senate for consideration.

The Illinois House unanimously voted 110-0 to override the Governor’s veto of HB 3298 (Scherer/Manar), which addresses the substitute teacher shortage in Illinois. The bill now heads to the Senate for consideration.

Representative Ann Williams indicated she will not seek an override vote of the Governor’s veto of her Geolocation Privacy Legislation contained in HB 3449.

Other Legislative Action:

The Illinois House unanimously approved HB 4095 (Harris) in response to the massive Equifax data breach. Under the legislation, credit reporting agencies would be prohibited from charging consumers to freeze or lift a freeze of their credit report. The bill now heads to the Illinois Senate for consideration.

The Illinois House approved legislation (HB 185 (Sims)) to extend the sunset of the current eavesdropping exemption for law enforcement. The bill now heads to the Illinois Senate for consideration.

A House committee approved legislation to ban bump stock modifications for firearms, HB 4117 (Moylan), by a vote of 7-5. Critics of the legislation argue that the bill goes beyond a bump stock ban because it addresses the broader issue of “trigger modification.” The bill failed by a vote of 48-54 on the Order of Third Reading in the House.

Legislation to require training in sexual harassment for legislators, staff, and lobbyists was filed in both Chambers the first week of Veto Session. The bills follow an open letter outlining accounts of what the letter deems “rampant sexual harassment in Illinois politics.” Additionally, Representative Feigenholtz filed a resolution that urges those in government to commit to working to change the culture that breeds sexual harassment.

First-term Republican Governor Rauner announced that he will be seeking re-election in November 2018.

HOSPITAL ASSESSMENT REDESIGN STALLS

Legislators have been working with HFS and the IHA for several weeks on a plan to redesign the State’s hospital assessment program. As reported previously, the redistribution of $4.1 billion dollars is critical to the financial viability of several hospitals across the State. Last week, however, it became clear that a new plan design would not be ready for a vote during this week’s Veto Session, and the parties involved agreed to delay consideration until January. The final plan will require federal approval, as its 3 major funding mechanisms expire on June 30th, 2018 (two on the federal level and one on the state level).

MEDICAID UPDATES

Medicaid Advisory Committee Meeting Notes

The Medicaid Advisory Committee met Friday in Chicago and Springfield via video conference.

Robert Mendonsa shared that the State has begun the transition of 1.9 million individuals to MCOs that received statewide and Cook County only awards. Mailings began October 30th, with a series of provider notices starting last Friday (see below). Of the 1.9 million individuals, 75% will be assigned to their current MCOs. The other 25% will be reassigned to a new MCO. Every member will have 90 days from January 1st, 2018 (new anniversary date) to switch to another plan. When complete, 85% of Medicaid patients will be in managed care.

FHN's transition to County Care took place November 1, 2017.

During Phase II of the transition, between 600,000-650,000 people who are not in a managed care today will be assigned to an MCO. Those letters will begin mailing on January 8th and will be effective April 1st into one of the five statewide plans. Auto assignment will first assign them to the PCP they have in Illinois Health Connect, if possible.

Phase III of the transition will be DCFS and children with special needs. The current planning is this phase will be effective July 1st for 35,000-50,00 individuals. The mailing will be sent in May. DCFS children will be assigned to Illinicare, and special needs children will have choice.

There was discussion on the provider credentialing process. It was noted that plans must provide office hours and affiliation, but for contracting with a plan, there are things a provider must make available to contract with a plan. Updated credentialing processes will also keep the provider directory updated in a timely manner, so it’s not just solely for credentialing.

Dental plans perform their own credentialing, and there will be a separate committee for dental.

Regarding the phase out of plans that did not receive awards, or plans that still owe providers payment, HFS awarded a contract to Myers and Stauffer (M&S) to identify outstanding payments. HFS will be sending letters to plans asking them to provide information to M&S. There are differences between what providers think they are owed and what the plans think they owe. When HFS closes out the current contracts, it wants to minimize the number of outstanding liabilities. HFS believes “the truth is somewhere in the middle,” so the independent advisor will provide assistance. The report from M&S will be due September of 2018. Much work will be done before next year, but to finally close out, the report will not be complete until September of 2018. The Department hopes that plans and providers will be solving problems during the process.

Medicaid Director Teresa Hursey provided an update on the behavioral health transformation.

Hursey stated that all state plan amendments have been submitted, and HFS is working through the approval process with federal CMS. HFS has a meeting next week in D.C. on the waiver.

The question was asked if HFS intends to continue to wait to have both the waiver and the state plan amendment (SPA) on integrated health homes proceed simultaneously. HFS would like them to be simultaneous, as there are linkages between the two that are very important. Integrated health homes are tied to the waiver in an attempt to help with financing for start-up. The SPA is the operational piece.

Hursey stressed that HFS is very passionate about integrated health homes, and it wants to ensure that any steps the Department takes now set it up for success. HFS will ensure there is ample warning and education sessions for providers to prepare for integrated health homes. An implementation date is still not set.

It was noted that another state received approval of an 1115 waiver last month, but the terms and conditions have not been approved. CMS issued specific guidance regarding the IMD waiver, which will be part of Illinois’ discussion with federal CMS next week since this was an integral part of Illinois’ waiver request. CMS has made no revisions to Illinois’ plan at this time.

It was also note that there are elements of the MCO contract that are tied to the 1115 waiver. When the waiver is approved, the MCOs must be able to provide what's in their contracts and follow state plan changes.

HFS is developing a contingency plan in the event the SPA or the waiver are denied for integrated health homes.

Legislative Update - During the legislative update, Shawn McGady noted that there remain two outstanding vetoes related to HFS that were not considered during the first week of Veto Session.

SB 1446 - prevents HFS from executing MCO contracts that were not procured via the procurement code process.

SB 321 - requires the Attorney General to audit some requirements in the MCO program.

Budget update - HFS continues to send bills to the Comptroller for payment, but cash flow constraints persist. HFS has $5 billion in payments waiting at the Comptroller’s Office, $4 billion of which is owed to MCOs for services back to March. Roughly $910 million is owed to hospitals for services back to March. Other items owed in small amounts are non-expedited, non-practitioner bills.

The expectation is that $6 billion in borrowing funds will be available this coming week. Over the next 2-3 weeks, the initial buy down will be the older, FY17 bills. Any other payouts will be due to the leveraging of federal match, which would be done as we turn the federal money. What happens after the buy down to payment cycles remains unknown

IES Phase II - Jacquie Ellinger of HFS reported that Phase II of the Integrated Eligibility System was launched October 24th. Ellinger noted that the launch has been successful, but not perfect. Issues were noted in three areas: (1) system slowness; (2) learning curve with staff for functionality (training still needed); and (3) system load; there are roughly 3,500 staff using the system at any given time. HFS has a dedicated group that reviews all problems in the users log so they can be triaged and handled quickly. Manage My Case (MMC), the new aid functionality, is launched. There is still a long way to go to full capacity.

Some key points to note:

ABE doesn’t work on older browsers (3+ years) and never will. Google Chrome appears to work the best of all browsers.

There are very tight security protocols to obtain an ID for Managed My Case due to the risk of identity fraud, so some people – homeless, undocumented, etc – will likely never be able to use the system.

In MMC, a user can receive an email or text when a new notice, such as time for redertimination, is posted to the person’s MMC account.

Maximus completed its last round of redeterminations in October, and the first REDE’s through IES will be in late November.

Everthrive is hosting a webinar November 15th that will cover managed care but also have an IES demonstration. Link below.

ABE website

https://abe.illinois.gov/abe/access/accessController?id=0.5968829369566411

ABE customer support – user guide and other useful links

http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=98456

Everthrive webinar Nov 15th 1-2pm IES & Managed Care

http://everthriveil.org/event/state-medicaid-changes-pt-2

Under new business, there was a discussion on opioids and what the state is doing to address the shortage of mental health providers. Hursey responded that both are part of the waiver, and this was the reason for the BH transformation. The waiver is a big important step.

HFS Managed Care Public Notices on How to Succeed Under Managed Care for Providers

HFS issues several managed care update public notices in the last week. Some of the more significant public notices include:

Medicaid Managed Care Contract Question

PBMS - Accessing Illinois Provider Portal

New Managed Care Program Series (#1): What is my relationship with health plans that weren't awarded a contract for the new program?

New Managed Care Program Series #2: Four key ways the new managed care will mean less work for providers

New Managed Care Program Series #3 Simplified credentialing: Cutting back on provider overhead costs

New Managed Care Program Series #4 How HFS and the health plans will communicate transition details to clients

New Managed Care Program Series (#5): How you can help your patients understand what they need to know about this transition

Transition Letter for Meridian

HB 4096 (Harris, G.) – Uniform Preferred Drug List

Representative Harris presented HB 4096 in the House Human Services Appropriation Committee during the first week of Veto Session. Representative Harris stated that his bill will establish a “floor” instead of a ceiling for the state PDL, which would not limit an MCO or insurer’s ability to provide access to drugs. HB 4096 would allow other drugs that are not on the State’s PDL to be placed on an MCO’s PDL. This will give the MCOs more flexibility to treat the population in their care. It will also give them the ability to negotiate with manufacturers, allowing patients to have access to the newest and most effective treatments. HFS was opposed, stating that it was simply being responsive to medical providers complaints about each MCO having a different PDL, and one, uniform PDL will easier for doctors and patients. HFS also stated that HB 4096 would reduce the State’s ability to leverage buying power and would remove HFS’ prior approval requirements for certain drugs. HB 4096 passed committee 10-6-0.

Opioid Public Health Emergency

President Trump has declared the opioid crisis a 90-day public health emergency. He signed a presidential memorandum ordering HHS to waive regulations and give states more flexibility in using federal funds for programs in prevention and providing treatment and recovery services to the 11 million Americans affected by the opioid crisis. HHS is implementing five specific strategies that are guiding SAMHSA's response found here. Emergency powers include allowing patients to receive medically-assisted treatment for opioid addiction through telemedicine and making dislocated worker grants available to people with opioid addiction through the Department of Labor. The public health emergency is different from declaring the crisis a “national emergency,” which would have given the president even more power to waive privacy laws and Medicaid regulations.

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**\*\*3** Shared by Denise Avant - **Elimination of the Standard Blind Exemption HR1**

Dear Fellow Federationists:

The House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, favorably reported the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act out of committee on Thursday, November 9. The bill now goes to the House floor. Please continue to call your representative and urge him or her to demand that the additional standard deduction for blind people be restored.

A summary of the Senate companion bill, also called the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, was released on Thursday, November 9. The Senate bill does not eliminate the additional standard deduction for the blind. This is extremely good news!

Please call your two senators and urge them to continue to maintain the additional standard deduction for the blind. Please also ask them to vote for any amendment which incorporates the Access Technology Affordability Act (S. 732) into the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.

As a quick reminder, beginning in the 1940s, as a result of NFB’s advocacy, the IRS has included an additional standard deduction for blind people compared to non-blind people. This deduction reduces one’s taxable income and the corresponding amount of taxes a blind person has to pay. In 2017, the standard deduction for a non-blind person filing as single is $6,350 and the standard deduction for a blind person filing as single is $7,900, an increase of $1,550. As far as the effect this deduction has on how much in taxes one would have to pay, that depends on one’s individual tax situation.

The deduction is not intended to pay for a specific item, but all of the extra items that blind people have to pay for to live the lives we want. Examples include transportation, access technology, readers, Braille transcription, white canes, supplies for a guide dog, etc.

Your calls and emails are making a big difference so please keep them up! The best way to contact your member of Congress is to call the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask for the office in question. Emailing your member of Congress is also a good idea. If you do so, please copy me at JPare@nfb.org.

Warm regards,

John

John G. ParÃ© Jr.

Executive Director for Advocacy and Policy

200 East Wells Street, Baltimore, MD 21230

(410) 659-9314, extension 2218 | [Jpare@nfb.org](mailto:Jpare@nfb.org)

Thank you for all of your calls and emails regarding the elimination of the increased standard deduction for blind people. I have received several questions regarding the purpose and scope of the standard deduction for the blind. In an effort to send out the information, my previous Legislative Alert over simplified some of the math. Here is some additional detail.

Beginning in the 1940s, as a result of NFB’s advocacy, the IRS has included an increased standard deduction for blind people compared to non-blind people. This deduction reduces one’s taxable income and the corresponding amount of taxes a blind person has to pay. In 2017, the standard deduction for a non-blind person filing as single is $6,350 and the standard deduction for a blind person filing as single is $7,900, an increase of $1,550. As far as the effect this deduction has on how much in taxes one would have to pay, that depends on one’s individual tax situation.

The deduction is not intended to pay for a specific item, but all of the extra items that blind people have to pay for to live the lives we want. This could be anything from transportation to guide dog supplies.

Please continue to make your calls and send your emails. The best way to contact your member of Congress is to call the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask for the office in question. Emailing your member of Congress is also a good idea. If you do so, please copy me at [JPare@nfb.org](mailto:JPare@nfb.org) .

And this:

I received an urgent request from our legislative affairs office, because

Tax is back. We will need to immediately contact Congressman Danny Davis and Congressman Peter Roskam, and ask for the following:

1. Please amend HR 1 to on page 25 to remove "and blind" so that it now

reads:

"(4) Section 3402(m)(3) is amended by striking ''(including the additional

standard deduction under section 63(c)(3) for the aged)''."

2. Please offer an amendment to HR 1 providing for the Access

Technology Affordability Act (HR 1377).

The contact information for Congressman Roskam and Congressman Davis is as follows:

Congressman Peter Roskam

(202-225-4561 D.C. Office

(630)-232-0006 home offices

Congressman Danny Davis

(202)-225-5641 Washington office

(773)-533-7530 Chicago office

Thanks everyone. Also call your friends and supporters and ask them to do

the same.

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**\*\*4** Shared by Flying Blind, LLC

**Hadley's 'iFocus Instructional Videos'** teach how to use the vision accessibility features on the iPhone, iPad and iPod Touch and are now current with iOS 11.1. Audio downloads are also available for each video and can be found at: <http://bit.ly/2vKk3b4>

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**\*\*5** Shared by Eric Duffy, via NFBNet-Members-List

If you are a screen reader user and also a user of the Mozilla Firefox web browser, please pay close attention to the following information. **Do not update to the soon to be released Firefox 57**. This upgrade represents such a significant technical and performance change that it’s going to be known as Firefox Quantum. The changes in Firefox Quantum are designed to improve the speed and security of the browser. This, unfortunately, also impacts on the user experience for screen reader users, most screen access software is completely incompatible with Firefox Quantum and those that still function will exhibit a serious deterioration in performance. At this stage, the National Federation of the Blind access technology team, VFO and NV Access are all recommending that users switch to using Firefox’s Extended Support Release (ESR) version in order to have the latest browser security features and to avoid 57 until it is suitable for use with screen readers.

You can download Firefox ESR here.

Freedom Scientific Statement on Firefox Quantum

NV Access statement on Firefox Quantum <https://www.nvaccess.org/post/in-process-halloween-2017-edition/>

Eric Duffy

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**\*\*6** From National Federation of the Blind via NFBNet-Members-List

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**National Federation of the Blind and Automakers Host Conference on the Promise of Autonomous Vehicles and the Disability Community**

Diverse group of attendees focus on accessibility of autonomous vehicles for the disabled

Baltimore, MD – Yesterday the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) and the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers (“Auto Alliance”) hosted a conference titled “The Promise: Autonomous Vehicles and the Disability Community”. The event was hosted at NFB’s Jernigan Institute in Baltimore, Maryland.

The conference brought together representatives from government, the automotive industry and advocates for the disabled to discuss the advances, challenges, and path forward for autonomous vehicle development.

“Historically, accessibility has been a costly post-purchase vehicle modification for most people with disabilities, and nonexistent for the blind,” said Mark Riccobono, President of the National Federation of the Blind. “The National Federation of the Blind was therefore pleased to co-host this first-of-its-kind gathering of disabled consumers, automotive industry representatives, ride-sharing providers, and policymakers, laying the groundwork for accessibility to be included in the development of promising new vehicle technologies rather than as an afterthought. Discussion between industry and disabled consumers has already had a positive impact on the Senate’s AV START legislation, and our continued work together will pave the way for autonomous vehicles to become tools that will truly enhance independence and opportunity for the blind and other disabled travelers.”

“Automakers have been developing self-driving technologies for years. We are motivated by the tremendous potential for enhanced safety for everyone and the opportunity to provide greater mobility freedom to people with disabilities and the elderly,” said Mitch Bainwol, President and CEO of the Auto Alliance. “Given the enormity of the social benefits, we are anxious to work with stakeholders and government leaders to develop the policy framework to realize these benefits as soon as we can.”

The conference was a key step in the ongoing conversation about how autonomous vehicles can be developed and deployed safely, while considering the needs of those 57 million Americans with disabilities.

Autonomous vehicles offer disabled Americans opportunities for increased mobility and independence, as well as reliable transportation that could vastly increase employment opportunities.

The National Federation of the Blind and Auto Alliance urge Congress, the Administration, and original equipment manufacturers alike to consider the needs of the disabled as they continue to develop the laws, regulations, and technology that will bring autonomous vehicles to the masses.

The day’s speakers included representatives of the disability community (including the National Association of the Deaf, National Federation of the Blind, Paralyzed Veterans of America, American Association of People with Disabilities, United Spinal Association, American Council of the Blind, and National Down Syndrome Society); the automotive industry (including General Motors, Audi of America, Daimler North America, and Volvo Car Group); government (including representatives from the office of Sen. Gary Peters, D-Mich., the U.S. Department of Labor, and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration) and other stakeholders (including representatives from Uber and Securing America’s Future Energy).

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**\*\*7** From National Federation of the Blind via NFBNet-Members-List

**Expedia unveils enhancements in website accessibility**

Expedia and National Federation of the Blind celebrate key accessibility improvements

Bellevue, Wash., October 19, 2017 – Expedia today announced details around site enhancements as part of an ongoing relationship with the National Federation of the Blind. It’s estimated more than 48.9 million people live with disabilities in the US1, including more than 7 million with a visual disability2. Expedia’s dedicated UX designers, as well as product and software engineers, are actively engaged in ensuring travelers with disabilities have excellent experiences when visiting sites like Expedia.com and Travelocity.com.

The Expedia Accessibility Technology Team consists of front-end developers and testers who use a variety of methods to design and test site improvements that make the Expedia.com and Travelocity.com websites as inclusive as possible. Screen readers (software applications that read out a webpage’s text content and convey visual cues) for example, are commonly used amongst the blind community. To make it easier for these readers to relay information, Expedia engineers have attached text to pictures and structured the code in a way that allows users of assistive technology to efficiently navigate the product pages. The National Federation of the Blind has provided insights, feedback, and testing on the implementation of these accessibility components to help ensure a great user experience.

Expedia continuously assesses its products, utilizing industry standards that address not only blind users who use assistive tech but also those who need captioning for video or audio, who do not use a mouse, or who have other differences that make these features worthwhile. In fact, Expedia has found that these enhancements improve the user experience for all travelers, not just those with unique needs. While recent activity has been focused on the current site, Expedia is also working to educate and train all of its engineers to design and develop their products, mobile and desktop, from the ground up with accessibility in mind.

“Blind people must have equal access to websites like Expedia to live the lives we want, independently,” said Mark Riccobono, President of the National Federation of the Blind. “Expedia is a distinguished partner in supporting our mission of ensuring that blind people have equal access to goods and services online and continues to champion accessibility overall through its product offerings. We are extremely pleased with the progress we have made in our relationship. We know that every user benefits from the enhancements we have worked on together.”

“At Expedia, our goal is to help people go places, and our efforts in improving website accessibility for the blind are helping a community of people that previously experienced difficulties in navigating online travel booking paths,” said Aman Bhutani, President, Brand Expedia Group. “Through our relationship with the National Federation of the Blind, we’ve expanded our duty to bring travel to everyone and are encouraged and excited by our progress in this space.”

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**\*\*8** From Hadley Institute for the Blind and Visually Impaired

**The Birth and Eventual Death of Our Solar System**

Our NASA series of on-demand webinars continues! In this session, it’s all about the solar system.

Join us as we review what the latest research tells us about how our Solar System formed, why it has the features it has, and what will eventually happen to it and the Universe in the distant future.

Humanity has come a long way in the roughly 4.5 billion years since the formation of our Solar System. But have you ever wondered how our Solar System formed, why it has the features it has, and what will happen to it (and us) in the future? Join Dr. Thomas Madura, Assistant Professor in the Department of Physics and Astronomy at San José State University, as he reviews the current understanding of how our Solar System formed and what will eventually happen to it and the Universe in the distant future.

Register below to access the on demand, recorded version of the presentation "The Birth and Eventual Death of Our Solar System." The presentation will be made available to you immediately upon registration. You will also receive an emailed link to the presentation to allow you to review it later at your convenience. <https://hadley.edu/SolarSystem.asp>

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**\*\*9 This week on Eyes On Success**:

**1744 Buying a Rental Property (Oct. 25, 2017)**

Have you ever wanted to purchase a house either to live in or as an

investment? Are you thinking that as a blind person that might be a

questionable thing to do? Well think again! Hosts Nancy and Peter Torpey

talk with Ana Garza, who has been blind since birth, about her experiences

buying a rental property and how she is making it work for her.

**1745 Be My Eyes Smart Phone App (Nov. 1, 2017)**

Be My Eyes is an app that connects blind and visually impaired people with

sighted helpers from around the world via a live video connection using a

smart phone. Hosts Nancy and Peter Torpey talk with Hans Jorgen Wiberg, the founder of Be My Eyes, about the inspiration behind this free service and how it works to help in everyday tasks.

**1746 TravelEyes (Nov. 8, 2017)**

If you are blind and like to travel, wouldn't it be nice if you could have a

sighted guide to accompany you on your adventures? TravelEyes offers just such a service by pairing blind travelers with sighted guides. Hosts Nancy and Peter Torpey talk with Dan Raymond, communications and media assistant at TravelEyes, about the service and how it works.

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**\*\*10** Shared by Joe Lanier

Don't miss En-Vision America's upcoming Black Friday sale featuring 50% off the **Quest i.d. Mate** talking bar code scanner! Starting Friday, Nov. 24 through Monday, Nov. 27, you can get a **like-new** Quest i.d. mate for half price!

Regular price $799 ONLY $399 with FREE SHIPPING! That’s over $400 in savings!

Shop online: <http://www.envisionamerica.com/store/>

or by phone: 1-800-890-1180 8:30-5 (Eastern Time)

HURRY! LIMITED INVENTORY AVAILABLE!

Special price available on sale dates only.

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**\*\*11** Shared by NAMA - NAMA MEMBER ALERT:

**Michigan Governor Snyder signs legislation to prohibit local taxes on food and sweetened beverages**

Dear NAMA Members,

Michigan Governor Rick Snyder just signed legislation to ban cities and counties from levying taxes and other fees on beverages, food and prepared food sold in the state.

Although no Michigan locality has launched a sweetened beverage tax campaign, the House and Senate’s passage of the legislation earlier this month is a response to a growing number of municipalities and counties adopting sugar sweetened beverage taxes, including Seattle, San Francisco and Philadelphia, and the recently repealed beverage tax in Cook County, IL.

The support for and passage of this legislation was the result of a diverse, bipartisan coalition of Michigan small businesses, farmers, grocers, and labor leaders as well as operators and leaders in the food and refreshment services industry –including the Michigan Distributors and Vendors Association (MDVA), a NAMA state council.

For more information, please contact Sheree Edwards, NAMA State Affairs Director, at sedwards@namanow.org.

Thank you for your support of NAMA.

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**\*\*12** Shared by NAMA

**NAMA 2017 Fly-In Soars to New Heights**

<https://youtu.be/nQJTBV42vfY>

Capturing the momentum of the third annual event, this report features interviews with industry veterans, first-time participants and NAMA CEO Carla Balakgie. The video provides an insider's perspective of the Fly-In, complete with visuals from meetings throughout Capitol Hill and beyond.

With nearly 300 NAMA members and guests convening in Washington D.C, the event far exceeded expectations, according to Eric Dell, NAMA's Senior Vice President of External Affairs.

﻿"This video tells the story of NAMA ‘Taking the Hill’ which set a new bar for 2017,” Dell said. “We could not accomplish our goals here in Washington without the tremendous support of our members, sponsors and elected officials - working together is key.”

“Participants met with lawmakers from nearly every state, extending the impact and value of these relationships. With this scale of involvement, NAMA and our members are poised to shape policies affecting the future of the industry,” said Jason Eberstein, NAMA’s Director of Federal and State Government Affairs.

For more information regarding NAMA Government Affairs, contact Jason Eberstein at jberstein@namanow.org.

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**\*\*13** Chicago Tribune on the Illinois Department of Transportation Survey on Rest Areas – sad this doesn’t mention the vending at all in the write up, the video they do say vending is ok, coffee needs to be updated.

Full article and video: <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/breaking/ct-met-rest-stops-20171023-story.html>

October 25, 2017 **What do you think of Illinois rest areas?** State considering fixing up some, maybe closing others

The state of Illinois is considering how to rehab, or possibly close, some state rest areas, and has even launched a public survey about travelers’ likes and dislikes of the Interstate highway stops — drawing thousands of responses so far.

“Many of our rest areas have reached a point where it’s time to evaluate their future,” said Illinois Transportation Secretary Randy Blankenhorn, in a statement.

The state has received nearly 4,500 responses to its survey in less than two weeks, and roadside restrooms have proved to be a popular topic.

Many of the state’s 30 public rest areas and 11 welcome centers on highways throughout Illinois are 30-40 years old, said Illinois Department of Transportation spokeswoman Kelsea Gurski. They are open 24 hours a day and have restroom facilities, picnic areas, maps and security cameras, along with parking for recreational vehicles and commercial trucks.

They offer a green, parklike alternative to retail locations such as fast-food outlets along the highway.

“As they reach the end of their useful life, we want to know how best to meet the needs of the traveling public — what features are valued by the public,” said Gurski. She said this will help the state develop plans to figure out what do with them in the next five to 20 years.

IDOT spokeswoman Gianna Urgo said in an email that the survey will be part of a comprehensive rest area study to analyze the existing system. She said a schedule for when rest stops may be rehabilitated cannot be determined until the end of the entire study, which will look at the costs of maintaining the rest areas compared to the services they provide.

This will include analyzing the survey results, documenting existing rest area services, identifying other available facilities, collecting traffic volumes and parking use, interviewing the trucking industry, collecting fatigue-related crash data and talking with other states to identify all possible options, Urgo said.

“Once the data has been collected and analyzed, strategies can be made about the future of the rest area system,” she wrote in an email.

Urgo said the survey, announced Oct. 11, received 4,417 responses as of Tuesday morning. The state will keep taking responses at idot.illinois.gov through Sunday, Oct. 29. Paper copies of the surveys are available at some rest areas or can be mailed upon request by calling 402-399-1405.

The 20-question survey asks travelers about the importance of family restrooms with diaper-changing stations, water fountains, playgrounds, maps and historical information. It also asks if travelers would like private businesses to be developed at or adjacent to the areas, which current law does not permit.

Rest areas were constructed as part of the Interstate Highway System beginning in the late 1950s and modeled after roadside parks, according to the website restareahistory.org, which is maintained by Joanna Dowling, a Chicago-based historian. Following the Highway Beautification Act of 1965, each state was required to develop a master plan for rest area development. Illinois built most of its rest areas in the 1970s and mid-1980s, Urgo said.

Closing rest areas and welcome centers is a growing trend in states seeking to address budget shortfalls, according to restareahistory.org. The road trip landscape has changed, with more fast-food chains and other retail destinations being built off highway ramps.

Ohio had 294 rest areas on its highways in 1961 — today it has 89, said Ohio transportation department spokesman Matt Bruning. He said this was due to changing driver demand.

“The private sector has done more and more to develop rest areas around our exit ramps,” Bruning said. “The need for a state-facilitated rest area has gone down.”

A representative of the Metropolitan Planning Council said the Chicago-based public policy research group would prefer that the state not close any rest areas, or at least do a careful analysis before making any decisions.

“Rest areas provide a place for people to avoid crashes caused by fatigue,” said Audrey Wennink, the council’s transportation director. She said they also provide an opportunity for people to make calls and send texts while they are stopped, which is much safer than doing that while they are driving.

Out at the Prairie View Rest Stop southbound off I-57 in Monee, the reviews were mixed. Linda Tucker of Cicero stopped at the facility on a recent weekday to stretch her legs but would not use the women’s bathroom, which was poorly lit by three overhead florescent lights. Two corners, one by the sinks to the left and the other at the end of the stalls to the right, were dark and smelled of stale urine, masked just barely by a floral scent.

Though Tucker said she often passes the stop on her way to her son’s home in Kankakee, she rarely uses the bathroom because it is “like a dungeon.”

Tucker, 59, a grandmother of eight, joked with other travelers that they might be better off relieving themselves out of doors.

“Go out back where the dogs go,” said Tucker. “It’s much better.”

She said the current human facilities are too dark and dingy. “It needs an upgrade.”

There were additional problems discovered by a reporter during a recent visit, such as the condition of the indoor water fountains. One was out of order, while the other was covered in a dusty film with flies circling the spout.

Some travelers said they wished the facility supplied bags to pick up after dogs — some visitors bring their own bags, but others don’t bother and let pets leave messes.

Other visitors expressed gratitude for Prairie View, one of the state’s oldest. It was built in 1970. The one-building facility is unremarkable, and its beige, brown and brick interior is a bit dull. But most travelers said they did not care; they just needed a place to use the restroom.

A couple of truckers at the stop expressed concern that there were not enough parking places for them to take federally required rest breaks.

“It’s more trucks, more trucks— every year more trucks — and we need more spots,” said Peter Fornal, a truck driver out of Florida. “It’s very hard for us to find a spot and take the rest, you know.”

The grounds behind the building are grassy and well-tended, with a few picnic tables and a playground. Just off the roaring interstate, the spot is an idyllic respite for travelers, said Jon Olsen, a retired Chicago paramedic.

Olsen, who regularly travels south to his winter home in Fort Myers Beach, Fla., in a recreational vehicle, stops frequently to let his two dogs take a walk. He said he had found that states farther south have closed many rest stops.

"I don't expect them to be perfect," Olsen said. "I'm just glad they haven't closed this one down."

Additional reporting by Terrence James of the Chicago Tribune.

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**\*\*14** From the Chicago Tribune – October 28, 2017

**Illinois gets thousands of responses to rest area survey**

Illinois has received nearly 4,500 responses to its public survey asking about highway rest areas in less than two weeks.

The Illinois Department of Transportation launched the public survey to get feedback because the agency is considering how to rehab or possibly close some of those rest areas, the Chicago Tribune reported "Many of our rest areas have reached a point where it's time to evaluate their future," Illinois Transportation Secretary Randy Blankenhorn said.

The survey is part of a comprehensive rest area study that analyzes the existing system, IDOT spokeswoman Gianna Urgo said. A timeline of when rest stops may be rehabilitated won't be determined until the entire study is completed, she said. The study will also look at costs of maintaining the rest areas compared to the services they provide.

"Once the data has been collected and analyzed, strategies can be made about the future of the rest area system," Urgo said.

The survey was announced Oct. 11. As of Tuesday morning it had received more than 4,400 responses, officials said. IDOT will continue taking responses through Sunday. The 20-question survey asks travelers for their opinions on topics like family restrooms, water fountains, playgrounds and other issues.

Illinois Department of Transportation spokeswoman Kelsea Gurski said many of the state's 30 public rest areas and 11 welcome centers are 30 to 40 years old.

The rest areas are open 24 hours a day and have restroom, picnic areas, maps, security cameras and parking for recreational vehicles and commercial trucks. The rest areas offer an alternative to retail locations such as fast-food outlets along the highway.

"As they reach the end of their useful life, we want to know how best to meet the needs of the traveling public — what features are valued by the public," Gurski said.

Full article: http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/sns-bc-il--rest-areas-illinois-20171028-story.html

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**\*\*15** The Illinois Survey is over, but this letter on the NFB website is still out here, if you haven’t done this yet please do.

Shared by Terry Smith, NFB

Dear Committee Chair: Please see the message below from NABM President Nicky Gacos. **Rest area commercialization** is still on the table and we need to keep the heat on Congress. We are hearing that our message is getting through and that members of Congress are questioning some of the public / private partnership initiatives being floated about. We need to make sure our issue is at the forefront of their thinking. Help us generate as many letters as possible to Congress. I know that when we first sent out th link, some had problems. If anyone has a problem using the site for any reason, they can email their name, home address, email address, and telephone number to me and I will take care of it.

Thanks!

Terry Smith

Hello All: Several weeks ago, we circulated a link that would allow you to send letters directly to your members of Congress expressing concern over proposed legislation to allow commercialization of the interstate rest areas. Such legislation would be devastating to blind vendors who operate vending at interstate rest areas and to SLA’s who rely on funds from third party vendors at these sites to operate their program and to offer benefits to their vendors. Rest area commercialization would result in almost 400 lost jobs, the loss of fringe benefits for hundreds, and lost revenue with which to operate the programs.

We’ve had a good response so far; however, with summer over, the kids back in school, and BLAST out of the way, it is time to ramp things up again. Please go to <https://nfb.constituentvoice.net/nfbaction/us-nabm_online_letter_to_congress_commercialization> and register your concerns. It will take you less than 2 minutes.

Once you have sent your letters, please:

1. Ask friends and family to do the same;

2. Post it on your Facebook page and/or Twitter account and ask all of your social media friends to log on and send letters;

3. Forward this email to every vendor in your state and stress the importance of letting their voices be heard.

Together, we can make a difference. ACT NOW!

Nicky Gacos, President

National Association of Blind Merchants

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**\*\*16** Starting with this issue of the ICBV Office Update, the information from RSA Management Group, Brokers, Distributors, and Industry Leaders will be moved to a separate publication titled ICBV Vendor Update.

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