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Lawmakers Look To Update SSI Program

by Shaun Heasley / Reprinted from DisabilityScoop / September 23, 2019

People with disabilities who receive Supplemental Security Income would be allowed to keep substantially more assets and would no longer be penalized for marrying under a new proposal.

Currently, in order to retain benefits, SSI recipients generally can have no more than \$2,000 to their name at any given time.

Lawmakers in the U.S. House of Representatives are looking to significantly increase that ceiling, with a bill introduced this month that would raise SSI's asset limit to \$10,000 for an individual and \$20,000 for couples.

In addition, the Supplemental Security Income Restoration Act, or H.R. 4280, would increase the amount of disregarded income that beneficiaries can take in each month. And, the bill would repeal penalties for marrying or receiving financial, food and housing assistance from family members.

Backers say the time has come to update Social Security's SSI program, which has remained largely static since 1972.

"This issue is one I have heard about directly from autism advocates and families in our district, particularly parents preparing for children with disabilities to transition into adulthood," said Rep. Elissa Slotkin, D-Mich., who introduced the measure along with Rep. Raúl Grijalva, D-Ariz.

"This bill brings the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program's outdated limits up to speed with inflation — a common-sense adjustment that will make a huge difference for individuals and families caring for someone with disabilities."



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"My Two Cents" By Tim Doherty, Executive Director

Well, as I write these words, we are just approaching the holiday season— Thanksgiving and Christmas. Both holidays bring back memories, good and bad, for all of us. So with this column today, I have no rhyme or reason, just a

"bits and pieces" kind of memories.

When I was a kid, we would go to my aunt's home for thanksgiving each year.

My cousin Mike had become paralyzed from an auto accident, and so the families gathered at his home, which was easier for Mike. My other aunt would come up from Delaware so that the three sisters, my mom and her two sisters could be together. We watched football before and after the meal, which often happens today.

Invariably, my mom and her two sisters would get into a fight during the time they were together, then make up before everyone left. I am told this happens in a lot of families. Anyway, this was my first experience with someone who was physically disabled. My aunt and uncle rearranged their lives, and continued their jobs, while Mike was at home. I am sure that Mike had his bad days, but you wouldn't know it when you met him—he was always so positive and had a great sense of humor.

Today, for Thanksgiving, Marion's brother and sister in law come up from North Carolina, and stayed with us a few days. John likes to re-connect with old friends here and very much looks forward to coming back "home". We gather family and friends and have a good crowd.

For Christmas, Mom always made sure the kids got what we wanted, in spite of my scrooge of a father. In his defense, he grew up in the Depression and was hungry for many days, so he watched every penny so that that would never happen to his family. We hosted Christmas so the relatives came over to our house and we had a great meal. Mom was in her glory.

As an adult, we often hosted a Christmas Eve "decorate the tree party" for some of our neighbors. We put the decorations out, and they did all the work. Everyone had fun doing it. Marion would cook a big meal or we would go to one grandparent or the other grandparent on Christmas Day. When you are newly married, that's what you have to do, to keep the peace. One year, our neighborhood decorated the outside with a "luminary" which is done by putting bags with lit candles and sand inside at the curbs, about ten feet apart, creating a beautiful lighting experience. It snowed that year, and all the neighbors lit their bags at night, to create a beautiful winter setting. We have since moved, but I am told the neighborhood continues this tradition.

Today, Marion and I spend our Christmas Eve in Church at midnight Mass as members of our church choir. Then on Christmas Day we have everyone over at our house. My brother and his wife come up from the shore, and bring the deserts—too many to mention, but suffice it to say, no one goes without desert. We exchange some gifts—crazy sweaters or funny hats—nothing too expensive. It's the one time that I really get to spend some quality time with my brother who I don't see much but we do talk weekly.

So, over the years, how we celebrate these holidays changes, but one thing that seems to stay the same, is the family getting together around a good meal. Being a part of each other's lives and sharing that time is what these holidays should be all about. Hope your holidays are also filled with the presence of loved ones. Happy Holidays!



From Norman's Desk

Last month I wrote about people with disabilities participating in politics in a more direct manner. Then I discovered a first-ever quantitative study of disability among American politicians with some interesting information.

Rutgers University researchers found an estimated 10.3 percent of elected officials serving in federal, state, and local government have disabilities. This represents a total of nearly 3,800 people and more than five percentage

points lower than the overall disability rate in the adult population.

The finding suggests that people with disabilities are underrepresented in the halls of power. However, the report finds three notable exceptions: younger people with disabilities, Native Americans with disabilities, and disabled veterans of recent wars are well-represented in politics.

"People with disabilities cannot achieve equality unless they are part of government decision-making," said Professor Lisa Schur, co-director of the Program for Disability Research in the Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations and co-author of the report. "While there appears to be progress, our findings show they are still underrepresented among elected officials at all levels of government."

The researchers analyzed 2013-17 data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, which measures disability based on four kinds of impairment (hearing, visual, mobility, cognitive) and difficulty with basic activities inside or outside the home.

The Rutgers report, Elected Officials with Disabilities, finds a bright spot:. People with disabilities ages 18-34, Native Americans with disabilities, and disabled veterans from the Gulf War to present (including those who served in Iraq and Afghanistan) are three subgroups that are well-represented

The study found a big difference too. Twelve percent of elected officials in local government have a disability, compared to 6.9 percent at the state level and 6.3 percent at the federal level. This reinforces Speaker Tip O'Neal's adage of "All politics is local."

Hearing impairment is the most common disability among elected officials.

Other findings:

The vast majority of politicians with disabilities are white, non-Hispanic men.

The number of elected officials with disabilities jumped from 8.5 percent in 2008-12 to 10.3 percent in 2013-17. However, the change is just within the survey's margin of error.

Norman A. Smith, Follow me on Twitter@normansmith02 Follow us on Twitter@TheFreedomGuys "Like" us on Facebook.com/ProjectFreedomInc

Program Makes Camp Possible For Youth With Behavior Challenges by TyLisa Johnson Reprinted from The Philadelphia Inquirer/TNS | July 23, 2019

PHILADELPHIA — Before 2016, Miguel Batiz spent countless summer days in his Holmesburg bedroom, using the computer, playing video games and eating. Aside from trips with his mother and two younger siblings to ride bikes or visit nearby parks, he stayed home, nearly isolated.

When the school year neared its end in 2016, his mother, Dorothy Miller, worried that Batiz, who struggles to socialize and doesn't like sports, would spend another summer in the house. Batiz was diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) as a child, and later diagnosed in 2018 with "high-functioning" autism.

Miller shared her concerns with one of Batiz's therapists, and mentioned that she could not afford camp. Immediately, the therapist mentioned a grant offered through the city's Department of Behavioral Health that provides money for children with behavioral health challenges to attend camp.

In the years since, Batiz, now 15, has flourished at the Northeast Family YMCA's day camp on Knights Road. And it's all thanks to the Madeline Moore summer camp grant, Miller said. Without it, camp wouldn't have been a possibility. "I just feel like if we would have never got the grant," she said, "he would have never had that opportunity ... to do all those things and meet all those different people."

Like Batiz and Miller, swarms of children with behavioral health disabilities and their parents struggle to find summer camps or miss out completely each year because it can be challenging to find one that makes the child comfortable and accommodates special or specific needs. But the grants of up to \$400, provided on a first-come, first-serve basis, can be game-changing. Funding gives families choices, the chance to choose a camp they think will be best for their children.

Since 1997, when the program began with limited funds, millions of dollars have been doled out to thousands of local families to make camp accessible for local youth, ages 6 to 17, with a behavioral health diagnosis or disability. Families submit grant applications through providers for their children. The department spent nearly \$4 million since 2013 to send more than 9,400 children to camps of all kinds. In 2018, the program spent \$499,220 on 1,335 campers — an average of about \$374 per family.

Department Commissioner David T. Jones said the program supports between 1,300 and 1,400 Philadelphians each year and "gives (youth) an opportunity to build relationships that promote greater social connectedness, and mitigate against feelings of isolation and loneliness." It allows the children to be included "with their typically-developing peers," which promotes skills that result in opportunities down the road, Jones said. Batiz wrapped up his four weeks of summer camp on July 12. While at camp, he made new friends, visited new places and played sports.

Expectations about children with behavioral health diagnoses can be a barrier to camp, says Carol Chase, who directs the program and manages partnerships with about 120 camps citywide. The program partners include local recreation centers, Boys and Girls Clubs, and YMCAs. "There is this stigma about children who have a behavioral health diagnosis, maybe what their behaviors will be when they go to camp," said Chase, who has been with the program for eight years. "We are partnering with camps that are saying send your children to us, and we will take care of them ... without any reservations."

Before 1998, "there really was not a place for children to go to camp who had a behavioral health diagnosis," she said. Parents worry about whether their children will feel safe and comfortable at camp, and whether they will be bullied. The grant kills two birds with one stone: removing the affordability barrier, and connecting families with camps welcoming to children with certain diagnoses. Stigma is an ongoing issue, Chase said, but one they see less frequently since the grant has been created. With the grant, "this child is integrated with other children and participating in all the summer activities without any type of stigma," Chase said.

Miller said camp "brought him out of his shell and helped him to open up." There, he bowled, rock climbed and zip lined. Beyond that, the camp offered structure that Miller said Batiz needed. "The grant was the best thing that's ever happened for this family," Miller said. "I don't regret doing the paperwork and sending him."



Hamilton Happenings

DATE	DAY	PROGRAM (in Community Room)	TIME
11/4/19	Mon	No "Day Rec"	
11/5/19	Tue	Voting MC General Election District	6:00 AM to 8:00 PM
11/13/19	Wed	Grocery Shopping - Shop Rite	Bus Leaves PFR 9:30 AM
11/18/19	Mon	"Day-Rec Program" Hamilton	Prog. Time 2 PM-4 PM
11/25/19	Mon	"Day-Rec Program" Hamilton	Prog. Time 2 PM-4 PM
11/26/19	Tue	Grocery Shopping - Shop Rite	Bus Leaves PFR 9:30 AM





Lawrence Events

DATE	DAY	PROGRAM (in Community Roo	m)	TIME
11/4/19	Mon	People & Stories		1:30-3:00 PM
11/4/19	Mon	Blawenburg Band	100	7 PM
11/7/19	Thur	Stress Mastery		4 PM
11/13/19	Wed	Massages		As Scheduled
11/14/19	Thur	Tai Chi		4 PM
11/18/19	Mon	People & Stories		1:30-3:00 PM
11/20/19	Wed	Nutrition		7 PM
11/21/19	Thur	Let Your Yoga Dance		4 PM
11/25/19	Mon	People & Stories	_	1:30-3:00 PM

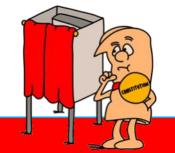


Robbinsville Events

DATE	DAY	PROGRAM (in Community Room)	TIME
11/7/19	Thur	Robbinsville Meet Savannah	Prog. Time 6:00 -7:00 PM
11/13/19	Wed	Grocery Shopping - Shop Rite	Bus Leaves PFR 9:30 AM
11/26/19	Tue	Grocery Shopping - Shop Rite	Bus Leaves PFR 9:30 AM







Hopewell Events

DATE	DAY	PROGRAM (in Community Room)	TIME
11/1/19	Fri	Mercer Home Health Hosting Pokeno	3 PM
11/5/19	Tue	Voting MC General Election District 10 & 11	6:00 AM to 8:00 PM
11/6/19	Wed	Heart to Hearts Chair Massage	1:15 PM to 3:15 PM
11/20/19	Wed	Heart to Hearts Chair Massage	9:30 AM to 11:30 AM
11/21/19	Thur	Senior Store Hosting Medicare/Insurance Information Seminar	2:00 PM to 5:00 PM

California Power Outage Sparks Outrage and Mutual Aid in Disability Community

Compiled from Published Reports

Last month in California hundreds off thousands of people lost power in a planned "public safety shutdown" of power to prevent wildfires. Sparks from powerlines were the suspected cause of last year's Camp Fire that burned down the town of Paradise and killed numerous people, many with disabilities, and this shutdown was a step to prevent such another catastrophe.

While the utility in this area had warned state and local officials about their intent during critical fire weather conditions, there did not seem to be much pre-planning by these officials for power dependent people with disabilities, according to published reports. The local NPR station (KQED) reported that local disability rights activists were particularly outraged by a Twitter message that the city of Berkeley sent in advance of the power outage.

In response to a tweet from one activist asking what help would be available for people with disabilities, the city tweeted back, "We are asking those in the potentially affected area who are power-dependent for medical reasons to use their own resources to get out."

The backlash was immediate and passionate.

"This...is not AT ALL how a city should handle a situation like this," Emily Ladau tweeted in response. "You don't ask disabled people and people with medical conditions to use their own resources to evacuate for a situation they didn't cause and that wasn't an unexpected emergency. Do better. Do way better. Now."

Meanwhile, in other areas, disability activists created a resource list in a spreadsheet to help themselves and other people with disabilities who were dependent on power for breathing, mobility, and refrigeration of medication.

The list contained places that had power, extra refrigerator, or other items in need. The list was shared on Social Media platforms and by word of mouth. Instant support networks sprang up to help people with disabilities in need. Before the shutdown, the disability community largely felt neglected by authorities in the run-up to this planned power outage.

"It has just been such a mess," said Karen Nakamura to KQED. "We in the disability community have been telling them for years that they need to prepare for events like this. These are all things that we should have had prepared months, if not years, before. We live in wildfire and earthquake country — this is just absolutely untenable."

The city of Berkley said it was also caught off guard by the last-minute outage plan and had to scramble to prepare. Despite the tweet noted above, it did have staff working to assist its highest-needs residents.

According KQED's report, the city has worked for years to identify local residents with "access and functional needs," and that upon hearing about the planned outage, the city quickly created a task force of representatives from city departments and local disability organizations to reach out to them.

It should be noted that within the disability community the city of Berkley is considered the center of disability rights, accessibility, and inclusion. Even the perception of improper planning for people with disabilities comes as surprise.

One advocate said this this power outage should serve as a "solemn reminder" to people with disabilities that they cannot depend on local government agencies and service providers for assistance during emergencies like this.

Yet the disability community showed resilience in addressing their needs as they sought support each other in the true spirit of living independently.

For the Most Vulnerable, California Blackouts 'Can Be Life or Death' By Thomas Fuller / Reprinted from Oct. 10, 2019 / The New York Times

As the widespread outages in the state continued for a second day, fears grew for sick and older residents and those who rely on medical equipment.

MORAGA, Calif. — When Ben Faus went to bed at his home in the foothills above the Monterey Bay, he knew there was a chance his power would go out but he didn't know exactly when. About 3 am on Thursday he was jolted awake because his sleep apnea breathing machine stopped working.

"All of a sudden, I was like, 'I can't breathe,'" he said.

The decision to turn electricity off for large areas of Northern California inconvenienced and frustrated hundreds of thousands of residents, but it became increasingly dangerous for people like Mr. Faus and the state's most vulnerable.

Some houses in Oakland, Calif., lacked power on Thursday.
About 600,000 customers in Northern California were
without electricity on Thursday afternoon, and there was
no clear indication of when it might be restored.

Credit Jason Henry for The New York Times

Around 600,000 customers were still without power on Thursday afternoon and there was no clear indication of when it might be restored. That uncertainty heightened residents' anger as food spoiled and businesses and schools stayed closed.

But the biggest fears were for the sick and older residents and those who rely on medical devices and equipment like electric wheelchairs.

"For people with disabilities it can be life or death," said Sunday Parker, who uses a wheelchair and lives in Oakland, parts of which were affected by the shutdown.

Although many medical facilities said they had prepared for the outage — ordering extra oxygen tanks and installing generators, for example — the uncertain timing of the blackout spawned confusion. Pacific Gas & Electric, the utility that turned off the power, wavered on when it would start the blackout a number of times before the second stage of power cuts finally came late on Wednesday. The first stage, which had cut power for around 500,000 residents, had come earlier that day.

Most of the concern was focused on people living on their own at home. The California Department of Public Health said about 39 hospitals and 103 skilled nursing facilities had been affected by the blackout, as of Thursday evening. Jan Emerson-Shea, a spokeswoman for the California Hospital Association, a trade group, said none of the hospitals have reported any significant effects on their patient services.

Hospitals in the state are required to have backup generators, which usually start running within seconds of a power failure, Ms. Emerson-Shea said.

Across the region, the power shut-off made for odd juxtapositions. In some places, a road separated those with power and those without. At the Sequoias in Portola Valley, a retirement home in the hills above Silicon Valley, only one phone was functioning and the facility had only partial power from a generator. Cellphone service was down. But in the valley below, tech companies like Google and Apple operated with full power.

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7-Nov	Thu	Robbinsville Meet Savannah	Prog. Time 6:00 -7:00 PM
9-Nov	Sat	Theatre: "Jesus Christ Superstar"	Bus Leaves PFR 12:30 PM
11-Nov	Mon	Veterans Day Observed - PF Offices	CLOSED
13-Nov	Wed	Grocery Shopping - Shop Rite	Bus Leaves PFR 9:30 AM
14-Nov	Thu	Columbus Farmers & Flea Market	Bus Leaves PFR 9:30 AM
16-Nov	Sat	Friends Connect Trip Moorestown Mall	Bus Leaves PFR 9:30 AM
18-Nov	Mon	"Day-Rec Program" Hamilton	Prog. Time 2 PM-4 PM
19-Nov	Tue	Mall Trip Neshaminy Mall 5 Needed	Bus Leaves PFR 9:30 AM
21-Nov	Thu	Holiday Lights - PA -5 Consumers Needed	Bus Leaves PFR 4:30 PM
23-Nov	Sat	Angel Award & 35th Anniversary Gala	
25-Nov	Mon	"Day-Rec Program" Hamilton	Prog. Time 2 PM-4 PM
26-Nov	Tue	Grocery Shopping - Shop Rite	Bus Leaves PFR 9:30 AM
28-Nov	Thu	Thanksgiving Day - PF Offices	CLOSED
29-Nov	Fri	PF Offices	CLOSED

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