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Astrophysicist and Inventor Speaks on Need for Social Security Net

Sacramento, Calif. – July 24, 2017 – In the coming weeks, Dr. Jesse Leaman will speak to local organizations, from his own experience facing the challenges of paralysis, about the need to preserve Medicaid funding.

With the help of the social safety net (SSN), Dr. Leaman has overcome all odds to become an astrophysicist, inventor, and advocate for people with disabilities in spite of – and because of – his own challenges. He believes his story demonstrates that Medicaid and other SSN programs are not a charity for the undeserving, but rather an investment in human potential.

Following a spinal cord injury in his teens that left him paralyzed from the neck down, Dr. Leaman received lifesaving medical care, wheelchairs, and funding for caregivers from Medicaid. Medicare provided him with power wheelchairs, and state programs like the Department of Rehabilitation provided tuition and assistive technology. The American Disabilities Act help guaranteed accommodations such as dedicated note takers and transportation to and from classes.

Determined to follow his dreams, and inspired by figures like theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking, Dr. Leaman pursued a college education, eventually obtaining a PhD in Astrophysics from the University of California, Berkeley. His contributions to the study of supernova and gamma ray bursts allow for better identification of astrophysical phenomena like exploding stars or the merging of neutron stars and black holes.

Starting as a summer intern at NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center, Dr. Leaman began to pursue his other passion, developing computer science and engineering solutions that could improve his safety and efficiency as a scientist. Not only did these adaptations help him succeed with his astrophysics research, they led to his invention of the Intelligent Power Wheelchair (iChair), designed to serve all power wheelchair users.

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The iChair integrates various technologies to achieve improved user interface, means of communication, and safety features for power wheelchair users. The onboard sensors are capable of building 3D maps and facilitating automated navigation. Dr. Leaman believes the iChair is poised to revolutionize mobility and accessibility in the lives of people with disabilities to the same extent that the power wheelchair did when it was invented.

Dr. Leaman is now telling his story to raise awareness of the importance of the SSN. He is confident that his story demonstrates that the temporary and ongoing assistance provided by the SSN allows people facing health challenges to still make a positive contribution to society.

For those interested in hearing his story, Dr. Leaman is accepting invitations from Centers for Independent living, businesses, schools, and other organizations at no charge. Engagements are crowd-funded through his campaign on GoFundMe, for which he is currently accepting donations.

Dr. Leaman can be contacted at 916-995-7347 or drjfl@comcast.net. Information about his GoFundMe campaign can be found at <https://www.gofundme.com/gryphontour>.

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