



# Washington Update

Check out the [PVAAction Force](#) page to view alerts and a list of key legislation.

## IBVSOs RELEASE VA BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

While Congress remains focused on finalizing funding for the current fiscal year, The Independent Budget veterans service organizations (IBVSOs)—PVA, DAV, and VFW—are looking to the future. On February 13, the IBVSOs released, “[The Independent Budget Recommendations for the Department of Veterans Affairs for Fiscal Years 2026 and 2027](#).” The report serves as a comprehensive roadmap to ensure the VA is fully funded and capable of carrying out its mission to serve veterans and their families, both now and in the future.

For fiscal year (FY) 2026, the IBVSOs are recommending \$166.4 billion for the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), which would enable the department to continue to provide timely and high-quality care. The Independent Budget (IB) report details specific funding levels and targeted increases for VHA programs, including a \$2 billion increase to strengthen long-term services and supports to meet the specialized needs of disabled veterans and their caregivers; a \$1.4 billion boost to fill health care vacancies; and a \$1 billion increase to cover the projected growth of new veterans seeking VA care.

For the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), the IBVSOs recommend a total of \$6.5 billion for FY 2026—a roughly \$1 billion increase over the projected FY 2025

levels—and \$296 million for the Board of Veterans’ Appeals. The VBA increases include a \$200 million rise to bring down the backlog of over 235,000 pending claim decisions; \$10 million more to support the Veteran Readiness and Employment program due to an unprecedented number of applications; and a \$32 million increase to implement VA’s Transition Assistance Program (TAP) 6.0, to increase in-person TAP classes and ensure adequate staffing.

The IBVSOs also continue to call for improvements in funding VA infrastructure projects. Specifically, we call on Congress to significantly increase funding to nearly \$10 billion—a threefold increase over FY 2025. For FY 2026, the IBVSOs recommend a total of \$5.1 billion for the major construction account to increase staffing and begin reducing the VA’s growing infrastructure backlog.

## UPDATE ON EFFORTS TO REDUCE THE SIZE OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

PVA continues to monitor efforts to reduce the size of the federal government and the effect these efforts will have on the VA and other federal agencies that serve veterans with disabilities. Most recently, on February 13, 1,000 VA probationary employees were fired, including those who support veterans benefits and services. It’s unclear what the short and long-term effects will be on



VA programs, benefits, and services. We will continue to advocate for the VA and other agencies to have the resources required to serve the needs of paralyzed veterans and their families, caregivers, and survivors.

### REINTRODUCTION OF PVA PRIORITY LEGISLATION

With the new Congress underway, legislation is slowly being reintroduced, including several bills in line with [PVA's 2025 Policy Priorities](#).

First, Representative Julia Brownley (D-CA) reintroduced the Veterans Infertility Treatment Act of 2025 ([H.R. 220](#)), which authorizes in vitro fertilization (IVF) to be included in the medical benefits package offered by the VA. In order to access VA's IVF benefit, you must have a service-connected infertility diagnosis which is very difficult to prove. H.R. 220 would allow veterans enrolled in VA care to access IVF services if they are struggling with infertility.

Next, Representative David Valadao (R-CA) and Representative Morgan McGarvey (D-KY) have reintroduced the Veterans Accessibility Advisory Committee Act ([H.R. 1147](#)), which would create the Advisory Committee on Equal Access at the VA. The purpose of the committee would be to address physical barriers, identify websites that are inaccessible, improve access to medical equipment, and remove other barriers veterans may face throughout the VA and in accessing its services.

Finally, Representative Brad Sherman (D-CA) has reintroduced the Housing Unhoused Disabled Veterans Act ([H.R. 965](#)), which would allow more disabled veterans to access housing resources from agencies like the Department of Housing and Urban Development by ensuring their VA disability compensation is not considered earned income. Veterans struggling with housing insecurities are often barred from non-VA resources because they are considered to earn above the Average Median Income. This bill would remove that impediment to veterans accessing needed services.

### PVA COMMENTS EMPHASIZE THE NEED FOR AIR TRAVEL CONSUMER RIGHTS FOR PASSENGERS WITH DISABILITIES

PVA recently submitted comments to the U.S. Department of Transportation's (DOT) [advance notice of proposed rulemaking](#) (ANPRM) on air travel consumer rights during delays and cancellations. An ANPRM is not a proposed rule. Instead, a federal agency may publish an ANPRM when it needs more information or data to determine whether a rule is needed, what the proposed regulations should include, or to gather ideas. [PVA's comment](#) reinforced the unique circumstances that affect passengers with disabilities, especially wheelchair and scooter users, during delays and cancellations, that are not experienced by passengers without disabilities. Because of these additional burdens, PVA recommended DOT expand the requirements for the remedies offered to passengers with disabilities and others in their travel party.

### FORMER REPRESENTATIVE DOUG COLLINS CONFIRMED AS THE NEW VA SECRETARY

The Honorable Douglas A. Collins was sworn in as the 12th secretary of the VA on February 5, shortly after the Senate confirmed him for the position by a vote of 77-23. Secretary Collins represented Georgia's rural Ninth Congressional District for nearly a decade before attempting an unsuccessful run for the Senate. He has served in the military since 2002 and is currently a colonel in the Air Force Reserve.

In his [message](#) to veterans and VA employees, Secretary Collins pledged to take great care of America's veterans by first putting them at the center of everything VA does. He also promised to deliver timely access to care and benefits to those who are eligible to receive them, celebrate the vast majority of VA employees who do a great job every day, and hold employees accountable when they fall short of the mission. He pledged to also challenge the status quo in order to find new and better ways of helping VA beneficiaries. We look forward to working with Secretary Collins in the coming months on ways the department can better meet the needs of our members.

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## SECTION 504 SUBJECT OF PENDING FEDERAL LAWSUIT

Seventeen states filed a lawsuit in a federal district court in Texas asking the court to get rid of [Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#). Section 504 prohibits disability discrimination by federal, or federally funded, programs, services, and activities. In the case, [Texas v. Becerra](#), the states are challenging [new regulations](#) published in 2024, that clarified antidiscrimination requirements for covered medical providers, services, and programs. These new regulations included requirements for accessible medical diagnostic equipment, facility accessibility, the use of mobility assistive devices, and more. Not only are the states asking the court to get rid of these new regulations, but also Section 504 as a whole.

If the court gets rid of Section 504, people with disabilities will lose their civil rights established by a law passed over fifty years ago. Right now, the case is currently pending before the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas. In the meantime, advocates in the 17 states party to the case are being asked to contact their state attorney generals to ask them to drop out of the case. More information is available [here](#).

## BIPARTISAN STOP THE WAIT ACT REINTRODUCED

On February 2, the bipartisan Stop the Wait Act ([H.R. 930](#)) was reintroduced in the House by Representatives Lloyd Doggett (D-TX) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA). It was referred to the Committees on Ways and Means and Energy and Commerce. This bill directs the Social Security Administration to phase out the five-month waiting period to receive Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits. The bill would also allow individuals who are uninsured or unable to afford health insurance to immediately receive Medicare coverage, ending the 24-month waiting period for Medicare.

PVA supported Stop the Wait in the 118th Congress and will continue to support it in the 119th. As an organization representing veterans with significant disabilities who benefit from these programs, we believe the waiting periods imposed for SSDI and Medicare are

an undue burden on people who desperately need these supports.

## NEWS OF NOTE

### PVA Capitol Hill Visits

Your PVA government relations team has been hard at work in the new Congress. Our legislative team has had several meetings on Capitol Hill with new members of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee to establish relationships and to inform them of PVA's priorities. We have also had several meetings with VA committee staff in both the House and Senate to remind them of the needs of our members.

### HVAC Holds Hearing on the Biden-Harris Legacy

On January 22, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC) held an oversight hearing titled, ["VA First, Veteran Second: The Biden-Harris Legacy."](#) Subcommittee Chairwoman Jen Kiggans (R-VA) chaired the hearing to examine the Biden-Harris administration's failure to hold VA employees accountable for allegations of sexual harassment, misconduct, patient safety concerns, employee concerns, and other allegations that have directly impacted veterans' care at the VA. Witnesses for the hearing included: Mr. Ted Radway, Acting Assistant Secretary, VA, Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection; Ms. Tracey Therit, Chief Human Capital Officer, VA, Veterans Health Administration (VHA); Dr. Mark Upton, Deputy to the Deputy Under Secretary for Health, VA, VHA; Mr. David Case, Acting Inspector General/Deputy Inspector General, VA; and Mr. Donald Sherman, Executive Director and Chief Counsel, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington.

### EO Subcommittee Holds Oversight Hearing

On February 11, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity (EO) conducted its first [oversight hearing](#) of the new Congress to examine the current state of VA's Education Service to ensure that the delivery of benefits is

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streamlined, effective, and meets veterans' needs. Mr. Ken Smith, the acting Executive Director of Education Service, and Mr. James Ruhlman, Deputy Director of Education Service, testified on behalf of VA. The hearing highlighted the need for implementation of improvements and the expectation of increased communication between Congress and the VA.

## **SURVEYS, WEBINARS & COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES**

### **Preparing to Advocate During PVA's Annual Testimony**

Join us on February 20 at 3:00 PM ET as we prepare for PVA National President Robert Thomas' testimony before a Joint Session of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees. We will start off with a warm welcome from President Thomas, followed by a breakdown of [PVA's 2025 policy priorities](#) by Chief Policy Officer Heather Ansley and National Legislative Director Morgan Brown. Registration for the webinar can be found [here](#).

In the meantime, we need your help in pushing our priorities forward. Sign [PVA's SCI/D System of Care petition](#) and count your voice during the hearing.

### **REMINDER: Survey to Assess Accessibility During the 2024 General Election**

PVA National is conducting a survey on accessible voting. The study aims to learn more about the voting experience of people with disabilities in the 2024 general election. The feedback received from this survey will inform our efforts to educate members as they face accessibility barriers in voting. This information will provide valuable insight and guide preparation for future webinars and other resources related to voting accessibility. To take the survey, please click [here](#).

### **Veterans' Committee Activities**

Please visit the [House](#) and [Senate](#) Veterans' Affairs Committee webpages for information on previous and upcoming hearings and markups.