Paralyzed Veterans of America

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Washington Update

Check out the PVAction Force page to view legislative campaigns and a list of key legislation.

PVA Holds Annual Advocacy/Legislation Seminar

On June 9-11, PVA held the 2026 Advocacy Legislation Seminar in Washington, DC. Over 175 PVA members and chapter leaders and staff participated in the event. During our Hill visits, attendees visited the offices of approximately 300 members of Congress. PVA's Seminar-focused priorities included preserving VA's spinal cord injuries and disorders system of care, codifying and improving VA's Bowel and Bladder program, increasing Special Monthly Compensation for the most severely disabled veterans, and raising survivor benefits. We encourage all PVA members and their families to continue engaging with their members of Congress through PVAction Force to keep the momentum moving on our priorities.

PVA Presents Mansfield Congressional Award to Retiring ADA Champion

On June 10, PVA National President Robert Thomas and Chief Executive Officer Carl Blake awarded the 2026 Gordon H. Mansfield Congressional Leadership Award to Representative Steny Hoyer (D-MD). The presentation took place during an evening reception after a day of productive congressional visits.

PVA established this award to recognize strong leadership and support of our legislative priorities in the areas of veterans' health care, benefits, and disability civil rights. Rep. Hoyer, who is retiring from Congress at the end of this year, played a critical role in the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990 and the ADA Amendments Act in 2008. He also championed voting access for people with disabilities through the Help America Vote Act of 2002. Throughout his congressional career, he has consistently supported the disability community and worked to protect and strengthen the laws that ensure equal access and opportunity for all Americans.

Veterans Omnibus Package Introduced

On June 10, House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Mike Bost (R-IL) and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Jerry Moran (R-KS) introduced a bill containing roughly 60 veteran-related bills. Included in the Take Care of America's Veterans Act (H.R. 9237/S. 4744) are provisions that would address some of PVA's top legislative priorities. This includes increasing Special Monthly Compensation for veterans rated as R1, R2, and T, raising baseline rates of Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) by nearly 3 percent and allowing future surviving spouses of veterans who die from ALS to receive the DIC kicker. It also includes language that

aims to improve and codify VA's current Bowel and Bladder program and to ensure that veterans with spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D) receive consistent, comprehensive health evaluations and are considered for innovative treatments that could enhance their mobility, independence, and quality of life. Other provisions seek to improve support to caregivers, VA's Automobile Adaptive Equipment program, and access to VA care for veterans with SCI/D. The bill even addresses the years-long campaign to eliminate the offset of military retired pay by VA disability compensation for some medical retirees by including a modified version of the Major Richard Star Act.

To pay for the provisions, the bill would codify a change to the VA ratings schedule for tinnitus and sleep apnea that VA proposed in 2022. This is a sticking point for some organizations. PVA has not yet taken a position on the overall legislative package.

Improved Oversight Could Strengthen Processes for Estimating Health Care Funding

Following VA's request of an additional $6 billion above the amount already appropriated by Congress for fiscal year 2025, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) was asked to review how the VA develops the health care cost estimates that support its annual budget request. The review focused on the Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) Enrollee Health Care Projection Model, which is used to forecast enrollment, utilization, and health care costs for millions of enrolled veterans and serves as the foundation for the vast majority of VA's health care budget. GAO found that the overall methodology is generally sound and consistent with actuarial standards but identified several areas where oversight and data management practices could be strengthened to improve the accuracy of future budget estimates.

GAO found that VHA does not have a formal process for incorporating newly available data into its projections after the initial model is completed, potentially limiting the accuracy of cost estimates provided to Congress and VA leadership. The report also noted inconsistencies in how VHA communicates data-quality limitations to its actuarial contractor. While procedures exist for community care data, similar controls are lacking for direct care data, which represents most services delivered to veterans. In addition, GAO found that VHA's oversight of its actuarial contractor focuses primarily on whether required tasks are completed rather than on assessing the quality and reliability of the contractor's analyses and projections.

While GAO did not identify fundamental flaws in VHA's forecasting model, it concluded that stronger data governance, clearer oversight responsibilities, and more rigorous evaluation of contractor work would improve confidence in VA's budget estimates and help Congress make more informed funding decisions for veterans' health care programs. You can read the full report here.

National Academies of Sciences Report on MST Claims Published

Earlier this month, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine released a congressionally mandated report reviewing examinations and claims submitted to the VA for military sexual trauma (MST). The more than 200-page report assessed the adequacy of tools and protocols at the Veterans Benefits Administration, including the Disability Benefits Questionnaires, the VA's schedule of rating disabilities, whether certain conditions linked to MST require mental and/or physical examinations, and if more invasive examinations were needed to diagnose certain conditions.

Additionally, the National Academies of Sciences reviewed what credentials and training are necessary for a Compensation and Pension examiner to perform examinations related to conditions associated with MST for men and women, as well as what credentials and training are necessary for a health care specialist or provider to perform the required examinations related to mental and physical health conditions. Lastly, they reviewed the quality of training related to MST for all who perform examinations.

The report listed nearly ten in-depth recommendations that were directed at the VA. Many of the

recommendations expressed the need for increased training and understanding of military culture, understanding of the health consequences of MST, training in trauma-informed care, and an increased focus on understanding laws and regulations related to MST. Additional recommendations focused on increased coordination among the Veterans Health Administration, the Office of Disability and Medical Assessment, and the Medical Disability Examination Office.

You can read the report here.

VA OIG Releases Report on Veteran Crisis Line Dispatching of Emergency Services and Transportation

A new VA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) report has been released that was spurred by allegations that the Veteran Crisis Line's (VLC) processes for dispatching emergency services and facility transportation plans were inefficient and negatively affected timeliness and quality of care for veterans in crisis.

The OIG substantiated the claims that VCL's process for distributing emergency dispatch services and facility transport plans were inefficient and did not maximize social service assistant (SSA) staff and resources. Two challenges were identified by OIG within the report. First, that leaders within the VCL and SSA ranks did not effectively communicate and collaborate with each other and often lacked responses to questions and concerns related to workflow processes. The second challenge was related to staffing, particularly for nights and weekends, which increased operational risk.

The OIG made two recommendations directed at the VCL Executive Director. The first recommendation was that they must take action to evaluate and implement mechanisms that facilitate ongoing, bi-directional communication between VCL frontline staff and leaders to ensure staff have an avenue to express concerns, share feedback, and receive timely, relevant responses. The second recommendation urged the Executive Director to consider using SSA-specific workload data to determine SSA staffing levels rather than a fixed ratio of responders to SSAs.

You can read the OIG report here.

Senate Holds Hearing on Pending Nominations for Offices of Information Technology and Accountability and Whistleblower Protection

On June 3, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee held a hearing to consider two nominees for senior VA leadership positions. The nominees were Gary Shatswell, nominated to serve as Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology, and Michael Tierney, nominated to serve as Assistant Secretary for Accountability and Whistleblower Protection.

Committee Chairman Jerry Moran (R-KS) emphasized the critical role both offices play in VA operations and stressed the need for transparency, responsiveness to Congress, and accountability to veterans. Questions directed at Mr. Shatswell centered on the need for a reliable technology system, cybersecurity, and the need to improve VA's delivery of digital services. From Mr. Teirney, committee members sought assurances that whistleblowers would be protected.

You can watch the hearing here.

Senate Hosts Roundtable on Infrastructure

On June 9, Associate Legislative Director Jennifer Hunt attended a roundtable hosted by the majority staff for the Senate and House Veterans' Affairs Committees. The event brought together leaders from the VA acquisition and construction offices and industry leaders in real estate, construction, and academic affiliates to discuss pathways for improving VA's acquisition and construction process. The group discussed pending legislation that would update rules and regulations to modernize the process and steps the VA can take to make improvements without legislation. PVA remains committed to ensuring that VA's infrastructure needs are addressed in a timely manner and that accessibility is considered at every step of the process.

News of Note

2026 Social Security Trustees Report Shows Trust Fund Six Years from Insolvency

On June 9, the Board of Trustees Report of the Federal Old-Age and Survivors Insurance (OASI) and Federal Disability Insurance (DI) Trust Funds released its 2026 Annual Report to Congress on the OASI and DI Trust Funds' actuarial status and financial operations. In this latest report, the trustees project that the system's surplus will be depleted by 2032. The 2025 projection stated the same estimated date for when the combined funds that pay out Social Security retirement, survivor and disability benefits will run out. Unless Congress passes legislation that addresses the shortfall, the report states that the annual revenue flowing into the program will cover only about 83 percent of benefits once the trust funds are depleted. The trustees' report lists three factors that are negatively impacting the program's revenue picture compared to last year: declining fertility rates and lower immigration, reducing the number of present and future workers paying into Social Security through payroll taxes, and last year's major tax and spending legislation.

PVA Invited to Speak at the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans' Conference

On May 27, Associate Legislative Director Julie Howell participated in a panel focused on how to advocate for policy changes on Capitol Hill at the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans' conference in Washington, DC. The annual conference brings together advocates from across the country to learn about new legislation impacting the fight against homelessness, connect with other stakeholders, and learn from experienced advocates before meeting with their legislators.

Surveys and Committee Activities

REMINDER: HERL Conducting Online Survey About Accessible Vehicles

The Human Engineering Research Laboratories (HERL), a collaboration between the University of Pittsburgh and the VA, is conducting an online survey to learn what vehicle features would make driving and travel easier for people who use wheelchairs or other mobility devices. By sharing your experiences and preferences, you'll help researchers understand what accessibility features matter most and provide feedback that could guide future vehicle designs. The survey will take less than 15 minutes to complete. To participate, 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.