



# *Washington Update*

From National President Robert Thomas:

**[“Choose VA: The Hidden and Inevitable Cost of Outsourcing Veteran Health Care”](#)**

**Update on Efforts to Reduce the Size of the Federal Government on VA**  
**[Open Letter to PVA Members from President Thomas and CEO Carl Blake](#)**

## **PVA’S ANNUAL TESTIMONY**

We need your voice. As we gear up for this year's **annual congressional testimony by PVA National President Robert Thomas on March 4 at 10 AM ET** ([Link to watch it here](#)), we are looking for ways to vocalize the need for increased support of the VA spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D) system. Over the last couple of years, we have seen staffing shortages, a lack of investment in infrastructure, and an overall increasing focus on care in the community. In light of our ongoing concerns, we created an **online petition** to quantify the need to improve funding and support for the SCI/D system. **Click [here](#) to sign your name and show your support.** We need veterans, caregivers, and supporters to sign! Take a look at our [2025 PVA Policy Priorities](#) and the issues important to our members. And if you are interested in more ways to extend your advocacy efforts, click [here](#) to view our current campaigns on the bills we support. We continue to add more campaigns as new bills are introduced.

## **SENATE COMMITTEE HOLDS NOMINATION HEARING FOR VA DEPUTY SECRETARY**

On February 19, the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee held a hearing to consider the nomination of Dr. Paul Lawrence, Ph. D, to be the VA Deputy Secretary. Dr. Lawrence served as the Under Secretary for Benefits (USB) for the last two years of the first Trump Administration, so he is no stranger to VA or the VSO community.

Questioning during the hearing followed current political tones with Democrats focusing on the impact of VA’s recent workforce dismissals and Republicans on community care access and streamlining VA benefits and services. Currently, VA has almost one million claims awaiting decisions with 257,000 being considered as part of a “backlog,” or claims taking more than 125 days. Dr. Lawrence told lawmakers that his experience as the former USB would be invaluable in reducing the claims backlog. A recording of the hearing is available [here](#).



## HVAC REVIEWS PENDING VETERANS-RELATED BILLS

On February 25, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC) held a hearing to examine five pieces of veterans-related legislation. One bill, the Restore VA Accountability Act (H.R. 472) seeks to ensure proper accountability at all levels of the VA. PVA's statement for the record noted that throughout the years, there have been unfortunate instances where those serving in leadership positions at the department have failed to fulfill the responsibilities of their positions and steps should have been taken to remove them. We told the committee we believe the VA Secretary should have the ability to remove bad actors from the department; however, we would not support abusing authorities like those in this legislation to arbitrarily remove competent and capable employees simply as a cost-cutting measure or in furtherance of any discriminatory purpose.

A much larger bill, the Veterans' ACCESS Act of 2025 (H.R. 740), would codify current access standards and prevent VA from manipulating wait times in order to limit veterans' access to care in the community. It would establish a defined access standard for the provision of residential substance abuse and mental health treatment, recognizing that when a veteran in an addiction crisis decides that help is needed, time is of the essence. This bill would also require VA to be more transparent with veterans when they are deciding their best options for care, whether at VA or through a community-based provider.

While the overwhelming majority of our members rely on VA's spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D) system of care, PVA supported the Veterans' ACCESS Act but reminded lawmakers that our members choose direct VA for a key reason. Beyond the loss of use of arms and legs, SCI/D can affect other body systems, including skin, bowel, bladder, and breathing. SCI/D demonstrates the interconnectedness of our body's systems, where damage to one part of the body can affect other aspects of it. Because SCI/D has profound and lasting effects, disrupting both physical and neurological functions, having access to a provider who understands the impact on each body system is a vital necessity. Most of VA's community care providers lack the knowledge, expertise, and time to properly understand the impact

of SCI/D on body systems. We also expressed concerns about the lack of inpatient mental health and substance use care for veterans with SCI/D who have other care needs, such as bowel and bladder. We called on the committee to include a pilot requiring VA to provide inpatient mental health and substance use care for SCI/D veterans.

Finally, the Student Veteran Benefit Restoration Act of 2025 (H.R. 1391) would restore benefits to students who were using their VA education benefits at an institution of higher learning if they were victims of fraudulent activities, including substantial misrepresentation through advertising, marketing, recruiting, and enrollment practices. We asked the committee to improve the bill by amending its language so the change is applied retroactively, and clarifying which programs would not be eligible for reimbursement. A recording of the hearing and relevant documents can be found [here](#).

## NEWS OF NOTE

### HELP Committee Holds Confirmation Hearing for Secretary of Labor

On February 19, the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) held the confirmation hearing for former Congresswoman, Lori M. Chavez-DeRemer, to serve as the Secretary of Labor at the Department of Labor (DOL). The DOL confirmation will be important to veterans considering the Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) is housed within DOL.

Much of the hearing focused on putting the American worker first and ensuring workplace safety and earnings. In the labor discussion is the ever-present battle in manufacturing, particularly in relation to China, and several Senators stressed the need to guarantee strength in American manufacturing. Increasing protections around child labor exploitation were also common topics offered by several Senators. There was a noted absence of any discussion around DOLVETS in the confirmation hearing. You can watch it [here](#).

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## Class Action Lawsuit Filed Against Disneyland for Exclusionary and Invasive Screening Process

On February 10, a class action lawsuit was filed in Orange County Superior Court against Walt Disney Parks and Resorts U.S., Inc. (Disney) and Inspire Health Alliance (collectively, the Defendants), challenging Disney's Disability Access Service (DAS). The complaint alleges that the defendants violated California Common Law, Civil Code, the Confidentiality of Medical Information Act and their general duty of care. Plaintiffs state that the DAS application process is completed in a non-private setting where intentional and/or negligent disclosures of sensitive medical information could be overheard.

The complaint also claims that Disney violated the Unruh Civil Rights Act, which incorporates the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). These allegations stem from changes made to Disney's DAS that implemented a new screening process to reduce program violations. The DAS terms and conditions stated that the program is intended to only accommodate guests with developmental disabilities who are unable to wait in lines for an extended period of time. Under the Unruh Civil Rights Act, all persons in California are entitled to full and equal access to public accommodations regardless of their disability. The Act incorporates the ADA, which prohibits eligibility criteria that screen out or tend to screen out individuals with disabilities. The complaint contends that this eligibility criteria screens out guest with physical disabilities and denies them of an accommodation required to enjoy full access of the park.

## ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS, SURVEYS, & COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

### New Advocacy Campaigns on PVAAction Force

As new bills are introduced on PVA's priorities, we add new campaigns on [PVAAction Force](#). New campaigns include [increasing disability access at VA](#) and [helping veterans grow their families](#). Check them out today!

## 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 advocacy on how 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.