

The Wheeled Herald



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Paralyzed Veterans of America

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\$1 Million Raised at Tee Off & Support Wheelchair Sports Golf Tournament 2003-2024

Our chapter's largest annual fundraiser - Tee Off & Support Wheelchair Sports Golf Tournament - took place earlier this summer. Over the course of 22 years, we have raised over \$1 million in support of our Adapted Sports & Recreation Program.



This funding helped provide countless opportunities for our veterans and the disability community over the years, including the creation, expansion, and ongoing operating costs of our Adapted Health & Fitness Center.

Thank you to Dan Dolezal, our dedicated Golf Committee, and the hundreds of supporters who have helped make this event so successful. The support you have given has helped us achieve our mission to improve the quality of life of those we serve.



President's Message by Randy Squier



How's your summer going? Hope you're getting some things done because it's half over. Time flies when you're having fun. With our golf tournament and a national bowling tournament behind us, it's been a busy summer. The turn out and results were spectacular. Heading into the second half of the year we're gearing up for our billiards tournament in September. Sharpen your skills on a pool table and meet us at Big John's billiards the 19th-21st here in Omaha. There's always something going on and we encourage our membership try to find time to join us.

It's time for chapter elections for our Board of Directors again and this year there are three positions up for re-election. Watch your email and mail for the nomination form and ballots to arrive. Perhaps you will consider nominating yourself or another PVA member to join our board.

Our bowling league continues Wednesday afternoons at 1:00pm at Mockingbird Lanes. Our poker games at the Chapter are still lively on Thursdays at noon. That crazy game of cornhole has even been talked about. Come join the fun, get involved and join the conversation. Enjoy what's left of your summer, I know I will. Take care.

Chapter Officers

Randy Squier, President
John Scott, Vice President
Will Leavitt, Secretary
Seth Kotouc, Treasurer

Chapter Directors

Dave Nelson, Director
Tom Timmerman, Director
Shayna Goerd, Director

Immediate Past President

Mark Linquist

National Director

Dave Nelson

National Service Officer

Mike Sheets
402-420-4017
MikeS@pva.org
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Mary Bushman
bushman@greatplainspva.org

Government Relations Director

Amanda Vazquez
vazquez@greatplainspva.org

Sports Director

Patrick Reynolds
reynolds@greatplainspva.org

PVA Member Wins 9-Ball Championship

Great Plains PVA member Chris Parnell had the opportunity to compete at the North American Wheelchair Billiards Championship, which is an invite-only competition. The competition took place in Quincy, IL and Chris won 3rd/4th in 9-ball! Congratulations, Chris, on this incredible accomplishment!



PVA National Advocacy Seminar

by Shayna Goerd, MS & Women Veterans Lead

In June, Amanda and I traveled to Washington, DC to attend the 2024 PVA Advocacy Seminar to learn about PVA's legislative priorities in order to present the issues to members of Congress. The top priorities we presented on The Hill are:

1. Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act-

Currently, there is a cap on home care prohibiting the VA from spending more than 65% of what it would cost if the veteran received nursing home care.

PVA wants the cap lifted to allow more veterans to remain in their homes while receiving care. This would also free up beds for those who are unable to stay in their homes.

2. Veterans Accessibility Advisory Committee Act/ Veterans Accessibility Act

This legislation would create a committee of disability experts, veterans service organizations, accessibility experts in the VA and others to identify accessibility barriers, provide solutions, and address them.

The VA feels this need is filled by other committees that already exist. PVA is asking for an accessibility committee specifically because the other committees that currently exist focus on other issues and are unable to devote time to accessibility. The committee will also include veterans who have tried to navigate inaccessible VA's to help shine a spotlight on issues that exist and be part of a solution.

3. Justice for ALS Veterans Act

Surviving spouses of ALS veterans rarely qualify for additional survivors benefits because of the quick progression of the disease, typically terminal within 3-5 years of the onset of symptoms.

PVA wants these surviving spouses of veterans with ALS to qualify for the DIC Kicker available to other veteran spouses without the requirement of having a service-connected disability for a continuous 8 year period. Due to the catastrophic nature of the disease, the surviving spouses typically leave the workforce to care for the veteran and would greatly benefit from receiving the DIC Kicker.

4. VETS Save Travel Act

This act would provide free access to TSA precheck to veterans with catastrophic disabilities.

PVA hopes that veteran wheelchair users will qualify for free TSA precheck in order to avoid invasive pat downs that are otherwise needed because wheelchair users are unable to pass through a standard metal detector.

While in DC, Amanda and I were able to meet with the congressional staff from Nebraska and Kansas. We were also able to meet with Senator Pete Ricketts and Senator Jerry Moran. At each meeting, we conveyed PVA's legislative priorities and the impact of the legislation on our members.



Anyone can join PVAAction Force to keep up-to-date on legislation that impacts veterans and people with disabilities, and easily communicate with your Senators and Representatives about your position on these issues.

Great Plains PVA Represented at National Advocacy Seminar

by Amanda Vazquez, Government Relations Director

In early June, Great Plains PVA's MS & Women Veterans Lead Shayna Goerdt and I attended PVA's National Advocacy Seminar in Washington DC. We were joined by representatives from all 33 PVA Chapters across the country and had the opportunity to listen to speakers from Congress, the Department of Transportation, and National PVA staff experts regarding air travel for passengers with disabilities, improving access to VA facilities and technology, addressing disability complaints, and increasing access to VA acute and long term services and supports. I always appreciate the opportunity to attend this seminar as there is a wealth of information to take in and it provides a wonderful atmosphere to connect with others to discuss these issues and how they impact our veterans in our home states.

Shayna and I spent 2 days on Capitol Hill visiting with our Congressional senators and representatives from Nebraska, as well as Senator Moran and Congresswoman Davids from Kansas (both pictured at right), to discuss our priority issues. We also had the opportunity to attend a hearing from the House Veterans Affairs Committee at which PVA National had 2 panelists: CEO Carl Blake and National President Robert Thomas. New at this year's seminar, attendees were invited to an Open House at PVA National's new headquarters to see the new office space and to network with other chapters, National staff, Congressional offices, and other distinguished guests.

I left DC as I do each year with a renewed sense of purpose and understanding for the work needed to accomplish PVA's advocacy goals. I look forward to the work ahead and keeping you informed of the priorities that make it past the finish line, and those that may require a little help from grassroots advocates like you. If you ever have any questions regarding the issues we are working on, or would like to learn more about them, please don't hesitate to reach out to me at vazquez@greatplainspva.org.



Great Plains PVA Member Elected to Serve on National MS Committee

Shayna Goerdt, MS & Women Veterans Lead for Great Plains PVA, was recently appointed to the PVA National MS Committee for a term of 3 years. "Shayna will be a great asset to the committee, bringing an enthusiastic and unique perspective to the work they will be doing," said Amanda Vazquez, Government Relations Director for Great Plains PVA. "We look forward to seeing the positive impact this committee will have on the lives of PVA members living with MS."





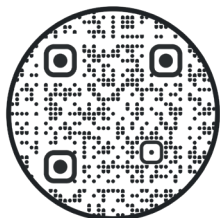
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Parnell Competes at Wheelchair Tennis Tournament

Great Plains PVA Member Chris Parnell competed in the St. Louis Indoor Championship Wheelchair Tennis Tournament July 26-28. He made it to the finals of the consolation bracket in singles and placed 5th/6th. He and his doubles partner Darryl Rahn took 2nd place in the Doubles Division. Congratulations Chris!



PGA Hope Golf Program Graduates 5 PVA Members

Great Plains PVA had an opportunity to work with PGA Hope Nebraska to create a program specifically for PVA members, which would include the use of the new swingless golf club that our members have been enjoying. This was designed as a 6 week program for the spring, but mother nature had other plans. Due to the extremely rainy weather we had, multiple sessions had to be rescheduled and the final session - graduation day - didn't happen until just this month. PGA Hope staff and PVA members and staff met at TopGolf for a couple of hours of friendly golf competition to practice some of the skills learned throughout the program. PGA Hope presented our members with completion certificates and a bunch of goodies to congratulate them on completing their program.



This was an incredible experience for our members, many of whom have never golfed before and maybe wouldn't have ever had the chance. We are grateful to PGA Hope for this opportunity and look forward to working with them again down the road.

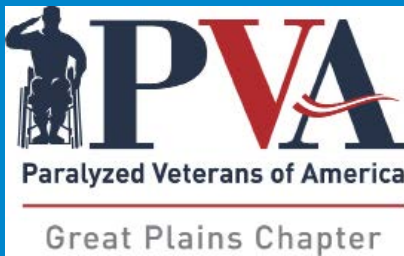


Omaha Power Soccer Club

Fall Session Begins August 27th



A program of:



Practice Tuesdays 6-8pm

at Great Plains PVA
7612 Maple Street, Omaha

Cost: \$40

***Scholarships Available**

In partnership with:



ABOUT

- Open to individuals who use a power wheelchair
- All skill levels welcome
- Practices include drill time & scrimmages



QUESTIONS?

Contact Amanda at 402-398-1422 or
vazquez@greatplainspva.org.

The GAME

- Allows individuals with a variety of medical conditions to use power wheelchairs to participate in a fun, recreational game of soccer
- Uses the same rules as traditional soccer
- A maximum of four players per team on the court at a time
- Players have guards temporarily attached to their wheelchairs and use a larger ball.

CRITERIA

- Any age & any disability
- Four-wheel power wheelchair
- Power wheelchairs with center posts or swing-away leg rests are welcome. Participants must be able to independently maneuver a power wheelchair at varying rates of speed.
- Participants must be able to follow one-two step directions independently.
- For safety reasons, no cords or bags of any kind can hang from the wheelchair.

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Cost: \$40/8 week session *Scholarships available

Register early! A limited number of spots are available.

Download a registration form at www.greatplainspva.org or email Amanda at vazquez@greatplainspva.org

Executive Director's Report

By Mary Bushman

Dear Members,

It's been an incredibly busy summer for our PVA Chapter, and we have much to be grateful for. Our annual Tee Off and Support Wheelchair Sports golf tournament passed the \$1 million dollar mark in cumulative gross proceeds raised for our adapted sports and recreation programs. This accomplishment is thanks to 22 years of hard work from Dan Dolezal and our incredible golf committee. This funding has enabled our chapter to provide some of the best PVA sports programs in the country.

The Chapter's first PVA Bowling Series National Tournament welcomed 52 wheelchair bowlers from across the United States for 4 days of very competitive bowling. Bowlers came from 20 states coast to coast and included novices, competitive bowlers, and members of Team USA. Bowlers new to the sport received some excellent coaching and seasoned bowlers had the opportunity to compete against some of the country's very best wheelchair bowlers.

Our Chapter's league bowlers definitely held their own throughout the tournament. Congratulations to the team of Karen Kennelly and Lisa Mann for winning first place in the Doubles competition. Karen and Lisa also teamed up with Robert Arciola from Illinois to take first place in the 3-person competition. PVA members and league bowlers Will Leavitt, Dave Nelson and Chris Parnell secured fourth place in the 3-person team division. Congratulations to league bowler Gary Standley for his 4th place finish in the Handicap B Division and to member John Scott for his 6th place finish in the same division. Congratulations to PVA member Shayna Goerdt for taking first place in the tournament's new MS Standup Division.

The next big sports event for the Chapter is a Wheelchair Billiards Tournament in September. The tournament will be part of the PVA Billiards Series and Great Plains member Chris Parnell is our Tournament Director. Please watch your email for more details and registration information.

PVA Bowling Series Year-End Awards

Great Plains PVA hosted the first year-end banquet for PVA's National Bowling Series. We invited all of our bowlers and their families/caregivers who traveled with them to join us at our chapter building where we had catered a "Taste of Nebraska" for dinner. The food selection included pizza and breadsticks from Valentino's, mini cheese and original runzas from Runza, polish sausage from Stoysich Meats, and Eileen's Cookies for dessert. We also served Kool-Aid - the official drink of Nebraska! During the banquet, Tournament Director Dave Nelson presented the year-end awards to bowlers who won in the following categories:

Scratch Division

- High Scratch Game - Kyle Kennon 249
- High Scratch Series - Eddy Hutchens 692

Handicap A Division

- High Handicap Game - Marlon Benn 205
- High Handicap Series - John Melvin 740

Handicap B Division

- High Handicap Game - Dan Formento 236
- High Handicap Series - Gina Jenkins 737



PVA Bowling Series Nationals Hosted by Great Plains PVA



Tee Off & Support Wheelchair Sports Golf Tournament

by Amanda Vazquez

22 years. Over \$1 million raised. Lives changed.

June 2, 2024 marked the 22nd year of our chapter's largest annual fundraiser: Tee Off & Support Wheelchair Sports Golf Tournament. This event began as a celebration of Dan Dolezal's 50th birthday, for which he gathered some close friends to enjoy a game of golf and raise money for a cause that was near and dear to his heart - Great Plains PVA's sports & recreation programs.

The first year of the tournament brought in more golfers and raised more money than we could have imagined - and it just grew from there. We have held our event at 4 golf courses in the Omaha Metro area over beginning at Fox Run, then the Knolls, next Dodge Riverside, and finally Tiburon where we hold our tournament today. We have met some incredible people through this event and look forward to seeing many familiar faces year after year.

This year, we had a bit of a rainy start as thunderstorms greeted us with the sunrise. Luckily, they moved on just in time for us to tee off and they stayed away the rest of the day. Our 216 golfers enjoyed 18 holes filled with contests and ended the day inside for our meal, program, auctions, and prizes. We had an incredible team of volunteers who helped throughout the day from the morning registration, manning poker stops and contests on the golf course, and helping close out the event with the silent and live auctions. We are grateful to them for the time they spent helping make this year the success it was.

This year's event raised over \$90,000 for our chapter's programs, and we are grateful to everyone who donated in support. Thank you for choosing to help us achieve our mission by making a positive difference in the lives of veterans and other adults and children living with a disability.

A golfer takes advantage of a poker stop along the course to try to make the best hand!



PVA member John Scott showcases the new Powershot swingless golf club to the amazement of our golfers!



The Baber Family volunteering to run The Baber Putt, a free contest offered to all of our golfers.



Special THANKS to Don Labrie (Don Labrie Photography) and Trish Werth (Best of Me Photography) for spending their day with us to capture some incredible photos throughout the event. Don has volunteered his time and shared his talents with us for over a decade and Trish joined our volunteer team for the last 6 years! Most of the photos we use to promote our tournament are courtesy of Don Labrie Photography and Best of Me Photography.

Tee Off & Support Wheelchair Sports: In Pictures



*Above: Golfers line up for the Mega Putt contest.
Below: Golfers wave to our photographer, Don Labrie, as they head out to their first hole to tee off!*

After playing 18 holes, golfers joined us in the clubhouse for a meal, auctions, and program. Mary Bushman shared some of the new opportunities we have provided with funds from this tournament, and exciting goals our athletes have attained.



\$1 Million Dollar Basket - Winner posed with Tournament Director, Dan Dolezal.



Best Dressed Team - JEO Golfers - posed with Tournament Director, Dan Dolezal. This was the first year of this contest!



June Challenge Announcement and Results

The June Challenge was a test of pulling endurance. Each athlete had to complete 250 pullups, 250 pulldowns, 150 ring rows or 50 high rope pulls (chosen by appropriate ability) for time. The caveat was every 3 minutes, the athlete had to complete 5 over-obstacles (curb hops/box overs), a distance on the handbike/Echo bike, 5 more over-obstacles before they could get back to accumulating reps. This made the first 3-minutes very important because as soon as the buy-ins began, you'd only have 30-60 seconds to get reps in. Fun format that I'm sure will be re-visited. Below are the format and results for the 2024 June Challenge:

- **Format**
 - For Time; 24 Minute Cap:
 - 250 Pullups, 250 Pulldowns, 150 Ring Rows or 50 High Rope Pulls
 - *Every 3 minutes, complete 5 over-obstacles + a distance on the handbike/Echo bike + 5 more over-obstacles*
- **Results**
 - 1. Ethan Eckelbarger – 17:05
 - 2. Travis Hasenkamp – 17:55
 - 3. Barry Ridout – 20:55
 - 4. Chris Parnell – 20:59
 - 5. Daniel Schmitt – 23:01
 - 6. Bruce Froendt – Cap+78

July Challenge Announcement

The July Challenge is a straight-forward triplet chipper. For time with a 15-minute time cap, the athlete's complete slamballs/medball cleans from blocks, dips/hand-release pushups and a row. Below are the formats for the seated and standing athletes:

- **Format**
 - Seated/One-Arm Rowers
 - 25 medball cleans from the blocks
 - 50 dips
 - 600 meter row
 - Seated/Two-Arm Rowers
 - 25 slamballs
 - 50 dips
 - 700 meter row
 - Standing
 - 25 slamballs
 - 50 hand-release pushups
 - 1,000 meter row

2024 WheelWod Games

Daniel is deep into games training right now. He is less than 2 months away from stepping foot on the competition floor in San Antonio, Texas. I will do my best to get video of Daniel's events, if they let me, but I'm sure they will be live-streaming the entire competition on their YouTube channel (WheelWod) as well. So between that and the BACK-TO-BACK NFL CHAMPION KANSAS CITY CHIEFS returning to the football field, it's exciting times!





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Upcoming Events

July

4th: Independence Day

11th: BOD Meeting 1:00pm

August

15th: BOD Meeting 1:00pm

27th: General Membership Meeting 6:00pm
*Dinner provided, billiards practice following

September

2nd: Labor Day

12th: BOD Meeting 1:00pm

27-29th: National Billiards Tournament at Big Johns Billiards

Poker games held every Thursday (except BOD meeting days) at the Chapter building at 12pm.

Omaha Power Soccer Club practices begin on Tuesday, August 27th and take place each Tuesday from 6-8pm through October 22nd.

CHAPTER BIRTHDAYS

July

Christina Caines * Paul VanCleave * Tammy Squier * David Nelson * Richard Conley *
Thomas Timmerman * Garold Chalupa * John Owens * Harold Bartlett *
Richard (Dick) Mondragon * Frank Kampovitz

August

Christopher Speer * Melanie Danhauer * Joseph Mumm * Camille Hopkins-Bailey *
Joseph Ruhnke * Todd Annett * Randy Conell * Carla Marciniak * Randy Tubbs *
Larry Kelly * Langston Farrish * Larry Gries * Richard Peters

September

Dianna Schnabel * Jabari Wright * William Leavitt * Christopher Parnell * James Neal *
Carl Schaffner * Charles Howard * Larry Dawson * John Speck * Gale Hendricksen *
Dennis Mitchell * Tedd Johnson * John McDonald



Washington Update

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

FOLLOW UP TO HVAC HEARING ON VA'S SCI/D SYSTEM OF CARE

On June 13, PVA National President Robert Thomas and CEO Carl Blake testified before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC) in a hearing titled, "[A Call to Action: Meeting the Needs of the Spinal Cord Injury and Disorders \(SCI/D\) Veteran Community](#)." As a result of the hearing, HVAC Chairman Mike Bost (R-IL) sent a [letter](#) to VA Secretary Denis McDonough to express his disappointment in the department's failure to fully participate in the hearing. In the letter, the Chairman noted that VA's SCI/D units are chronically understaffed. He also stated that, "Regardless of whether the provider vacancy rate is 9%, as VA testified, or 30%, as PVA testified, VA Medical Centers' (VAMC) are allegedly pulling providers off the SCI/D units to fill staffing vacancies in other departments. That is unacceptable." The Chairman has requested a response by July 22. We will continue to work with the committee to ensure that the health care and benefit needs of PVA members are addressed.

HOUSE VA SUBCOMMITTEE HOLDS LEGISLATIVE HEARING

On July 10, the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs held a legislative hearing to examine nearly 20 pieces of

pending and draft legislation. They included the Flowers for Fallen Heroes Act (H.R. 8792), which would allow those wishing to lay flowers on the graves of fallen heroes who are interred at American military cemeteries overseas to do so through the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC). The bill mandates the creation of a user-friendly website for friends and family members to find reasonably priced vendors in proximity to the gravesites. It also urges the ABMC to market the program and requires them to submit a yearly report to Congress on its progress.

Another bill, the Simplifying Forms for Veterans Claims Act (H.R. 8880), directs the VA to contract with an outside entity to study and provide recommendations on how to make VA forms easier to understand when veterans apply for disability benefits. It also requires the VA Secretary to report these findings to Congress and implement any recommendations.

Finally, the Rural Veterans' Improved Access to Benefits Act (H.R. 8881), would expand the categories of providers who can perform cross-state disability exams and make the authority to do so permanent. The Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 (P.L. 116-315) allowed only certain exam providers to temporarily practice across state lines. That authority would expire in January 2026. H.R. 8881 would also require the department to establish a mechanism for providers to

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submit evidence that a veteran brings with them to the examination to the VA, a process which is currently not in place. The text of each bill examined and a video of the hearing can be found [here](#).

HOUSE COMMITTEE EXAMINES THE STRUCTURE OF VA'S HEALTHCARE NETWORK

On June 26, the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health held an oversight hearing to assess the structure of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). Currently, VHA is divided into 18 Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) across the country, which are regional systems of care working together to better meet local health care needs. VA's principal witness, Mr. Alfred Montoya, VHA's Deputy Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Operations, discussed the role of the VISNs and how they work to support VA's medical centers. He reminded the subcommittee that independent research shows VA medical centers consistently outperform non-VA medical facilities. Dr. Kenneth W. Kizer, former VA Under Secretary for Health, also discussed the VISN concept and indicated that while the current system remains sound, it might be worthwhile to consider whether the present configuration is ideal.

Dr. Julie Kroviak, MD, VA's Principal Deputy Assistant Inspector General for Healthcare Inspections, told the subcommittee that VA's Office of the Inspector General (VAOIG) has published a series of reports indicating serious problems and gaps in how VISN leaders interact with VA medical center leaders. VAOIG has also reported some VISN leaders cultivated hostile environments that prevented medical centers from operating as high reliability organizations (HRO). Employees' ability to report problems without fear of retaliation is a key element of an HRO, and in some VISNs, employees were afraid to report concerns out of fear of reprisal. She also said VAOIG has repeatedly discovered inconsistent practices and inefficiencies across the VISNs which run counter to the department's efforts to transform itself into an HRO. This issue came up again during the Q&A session and Dr. Kroviak reiterated that gaps in care and efficiencies would continue to exist until VHA roles and responsibilities are standardized.

Subcommittee Chair Mariannette Miller-Meeks (R-IA) said it was unacceptable that the department had not yet developed policies for standardization. Mr. Montoya committed to working toward having the policies in place by this October.

You can view a recording of the hearing [here](#).

SENATE COMMITTEE OKS MILITARY CONSTRUCTION-VA SPENDING BILL

On July 11, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved its version of a bill to fund military construction projects and the VA in the coming fiscal year. The \$359.3 billion-dollar measure is \$3.5 billion higher than a similar measure approved by the full House on June 5. \$210.4 billion would go toward mandatory programs such as VA disability compensation and education programs. Another \$129.6 billion is designated for discretionary spending, money that goes toward VA medical care, medical research, and information technology, including the department's new electronic health care record system. Unlike the House bill, the Senate's measure does not include language addressing controversial policy and social issues. The next stop for the bill is the full Senate, but it is unclear if the chamber has enough time to consider the measure before the August recess. The final bill text, as approved by the committee, is available [here](#), and the amended bill report is available [here](#).

SENATE RELEASES TEXT OF ANNUAL DEFENSE POLICY BILL

The Senate Armed Services Committee recently released its version of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). All totaled, S. 4638 would authorize \$919.9 billion for national security spending in fiscal year 2025, which includes \$875 billion for the Defense Department and \$33.4 billion for nuclear programs within the Department of Energy. While the NDAA primarily focuses on matters pertaining to military servicemembers, it has been used in recent years to advance important veterans-related provisions. The only such provision currently in the bill is an extension for the

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joint Department of Defense-VA medical facility demonstration fund.

The bill's next stop is the Senate floor. Lawmakers in that chamber have already proposed over 800 changes to the bill, including one to adopt the language of the Major Richard Star Act (S. 344). This PVA-endorsed legislation would allow more military retirees to retain their full military retired pay and VA disability compensation without any offsets. Other amendments filed include the language of the Justice for ALS Veterans Act (S. 1590) and one that would eliminate the cap that prevents VA from spending more than 65 percent of what it would cost for a veteran to be in a nursing home on home care services. The House approved its version of the bill in June.

NEWS OF NOTE

Reeve Foundation Expands Initiative to Spread Awareness on Accessible Water-Based Activities

Earlier this summer, the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation announced the expansion of their [Outdoors for Everyone](#) initiative to include a focus on water accessibility. The Outdoors for Everyone initiative launched in 2023 with the goal of increasing accessibility of outdoor trails and parks to people with disabilities, specifically those living with or impacted by paralysis. The initiative's expansion includes a partnership with the National Park Service to add programs and resources to the Foundation's [resource map](#). As part of the expansion, the Foundation has created a [water accessibility checklist](#) for outdoor and community organizations to use as a resource in ensuring people with disabilities can access and enjoy water-based activities. PVA's Wisconsin Chapter partnered with the Foundation on this effort to break down barriers to water accessibility.

Additional Federal Funding Awarded to Improve Legacy Rail Station Accessibility

The All Stations Accessibility Program (ASAP) was

created under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to provide federal grants to upgrade the accessibility of legacy rail stations for people with disabilities. The funds may be used to repair, improve, modify, retrofit, or relocate infrastructure of passenger stations or facilities to increase accessibility. The program can award up to \$350 million a year between 2022 and 2026. In mid-June, the first ASAP groundbreaking took place at a SEPTA station in North Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Other recipients of the ASAP funds include the Metropolitan Transportation Authority in New York City, the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency, and the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority.

House Veterans' Affairs Committee Hearing Highlights

On June 26, the Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Oversight Subcommittee for the House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC) held an oversight hearing that examined questions and concerns with the VA National Work Queue for the veteran benefits claims management system (VBMS). Members of Congress expressed concerns with timelines for veteran claims decisions and pressed the VA on areas they believe need improvement, including reducing redundancies, keeping claims within the same regional office, and improving the timeliness of critical claims such as those for terminal diagnoses and those related to military sexual trauma (MST). You can watch the hearing [here](#).

The following day, the HVAC Economic Opportunity Subcommittee held an oversight hearing that explored the use of data-driven methods and community collaboration to reduce veteran homelessness. Several members of Congress pushed the Deputy Undersecretary for Health for Clinical Services at VA to explain how data has helped the department decrease the number of homeless veterans. The Executive Director of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness also testified to share how the federal government is working with various agencies, including the VA, to reduce the number of homeless veterans, while increasing services and supports for those still in need. The second panel was comprised of local organizations that support homeless veterans in their areas. You can watch the hearing [here](#).

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Paralyzed Veterans of America Great Plains Chapter (Great Plains PVA) is a non-profit organization that has dedicated over 50 years to helping veterans with spinal cord injuries, as well as other individuals living with disabilities across Nebraska, Western-Iowa, and Kansas. Great Plains PVA is dedicated to improving quality of life by providing education, promoting equal opportunities, encouraging independence, and enhancing lifetime health and fitness. PVA is at the forefront helping and advocating for the rights and benefits of veterans and all people living with disabilities.