

The Wheeled Herald



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Paralyzed Veterans of America

Great Plains Chapter

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Giving Tuesday

Great Plains PVA is proud to join with hundreds of other local nonprofits to be a part of the Share Omaha Giving Tuesday campaign in Omaha. We are hoping to raise funds to support our programs & events in 2025. This year, we are doing a gift card drive with a goal of receiving 100 gift cards at \$25 each that we could use to support our veterans and their families through programming prizes and fund-raising efforts.

If you would like to support this effort, or simply provide a cash donation, you can scan the QR code to go directly to our Share Omaha profile page.



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\$2,500 goal!**

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Paralyzed Veterans of America
Great Plains Chapter

President's Message by Randy Squier

As the year winds down we're down to just a few remaining activities. Thanksgiving is here and Christmas soon will follow. Don't miss our Christmas party on December 6th at the chapter building.

A favorite event of this chapter is the presentation of the Nurse of the Quarter. We present this award four times a year. This award dates back to the 1990s and is a crowd favorite honoring the nurses who work at the VA hospital and do so much for the veterans. It's an honor to recognize those worker bees in a complicated system of healthcare. Where would we be without their dedication to helping the veterans?

Happy holidays to all! It's been another gratifying year.



Randy Squier & Will Leavitt presented the Nurse of the Quarter award to Nurse Manager Jamie Howard for her exceptional care overseeing patient transfers.

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
LisaN@pva.org

Executive Director

Mary Bushman
bushman@greatplainspva.org

Government Relations Director

Amanda Vazquez
vazquez@greatplainspva.org

Sports Director

Patrick Reynolds
reynolds@greatplainspva.org

PVA National Service Office Update

PVA Members -

We have received a few emails and phone calls from members who have tried reaching Laura Niederhouse by email. Laura used to work in the NSO office for many years, but she retired last year. If you send an email to her address it will not be seen by anyone.

Lisa Nibling has been working with NSO Mike Sheets for a couple of years in the Lincoln office, so if you have any questions regarding your benefits, you can reach out to Mike or Lisa at 402-420-4017 or by email:

Mike Sheets: mikes@pva.org

Lisa Nibling: lisan@pva.org

Executive Director's Report

By Mary Bushman

Dear Members,

It's been a busy last two months at the Great Plains Chapter with multiple new and returning events on the calendar. The Chapter's Omaha Power Soccer Club practiced weekly in the PVA gym. Practices were elevated this session when 2 more players acquired specialized power soccer chairs. At least 2 more power soccer chairs are expected for the spring session.

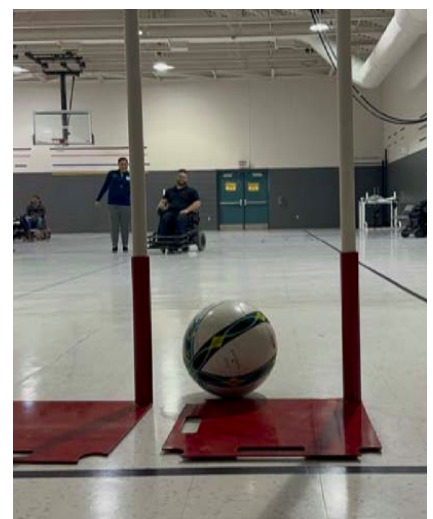
The Chapter hosted its annual Trunk or Treat event the end of October. Thirty-four themed trunks captured the spirit of the holiday and provided safe, accessible trick or treating for area children living with disabilities and their families. Thank you to our Great Plains PVA members and the following partner organizations and businesses for decorating and hosting trunks for the event: Nebraska Spina Bifida, Wounded Warrior Project, Mobility Motoring, Gotta Be Me, Omaha Area Bikers, Key Complete Therapy, and Nebraska Miss Amazing.

In November, the chapter had the opportunity to partner with Wounded Warrior Project and the American Cornhole Organization to present the city's first Adapted Cornhole Clinic and Tournament. The two-day event started with a clinic hosted by American Cornhole Organization Pro Matt Davis. On day two, players had a chance to try their new skills while competing in three different divisions: seated, standing and adapted.

It is a Chapter tradition to celebrate Veterans Day by visiting area grade schools and recognizing the winning students of our annual poster and poem contest. This year's theme was "Accessibility for All" and the chapter received over 300 entries from some very talented and inciteful students. It was very encouraging to see the amount of thought and care that went into creating the posters and poems.

Best wishes to all our members, auxiliary and friends for a happy and healthy holiday season!

Photos from our Omaha Power Soccer Club Fall Session



PVA Trunk or Treat

Thank you to everyone who hosted a trunk and helped make this event such a success! We had a full parking lot with so much creativity on display, along with lots of trick or treaters with happy faces! This has become a favorite event among our veterans and staff.



Adapted Cornhole Event



On November 8th & 9th, Great Plains PVA hosted Omaha's first adapted cornhole event. The project came about when Matt Davis from the American Cornhole Organization (ACO) reached out to the local Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) group about bringing adapted cornhole to the Omaha area. Great Plains PVA board member Will Leavitt is a member of WWP and proposed a PVA/WWP partnership for the event.

The event was held at Great Plains PVA and began with a clinic on Friday night. Matt Davis, who is a professional cornhole player with ACO, travels around the U.S. promoting Adapted Cornhole and hosting tournaments. During the clinic, Matt gave a history of the sport, discussed rules & scoring, and talked about distance adaptations. Players then tried out different throwing techniques and distances. Following the clinic, a dinner was provided by the Wounded Warrior Project.

Players returned on Saturday afternoon to use skills they learned at the clinic in competition. There were three divisions: Seated, Standing, and Adapted. Traditional cornhole is played with the boards at a distance of 27 ft. apart. The Seated and Standing division players had the option of throwing at distances up to 14 ft. Players competing in the Adapted division threw at the ACO Adapted distance of 24 ft. The tournament had 26 players divided among the 3 divisions.

We were very fortunate to have student volunteers from Milliard Central Middle School's Bridge to Early College Program with us for the day. Ten students and 3 parents assisted with scoring and retrieving cornhole bags. A lunch for the players and volunteers was provided by the Wounded Warrior Project. Congratulations to our tournament winners:

Seated Division: 1st – Mark Linquist, 2nd – Garret Hardy, 3rd – John Scott
Standing Division: 1st – Shayna Goerdt, 2nd -Heith Inghels, 3rd – Matt Millan
Adapted Division: 1st – Matt Davis, 2nd – Matt Ross, 3rd - Chris Parnell





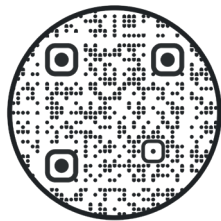
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2024 PVA Women Veterans Empowerment Retreat

by Shayna Goerd, MS & Women Veterans Lead

This year, team veterans from across the country gathered in Long Beach, CA for the Women Veterans Empowerment Retreat (WVER). The events vary from year to year in order to incorporate feedback from previous years, which meant this year had a heavier focus on networking than it did on learning sessions. There was a session presented by Hounds and Heroes, a non-profit organization that expanded to include horses as well at the Battle Buddy Ranch in TX. The organization focuses on emotional support animal experiences. Another session guided the female veterans through ways to present their stories. This was a valuable session because it helped many of the vets to discuss their service and their injury/disease that brought them to PVA. To be sure, the exercise alone was empowering, but many also found it useful because they'd be better able to advocate for other veterans, women, or others with disabilities by being able to effectively share their life stories.

The learning sessions were very well received as many WVER attendees found them impactful. But as I mentioned, there was more of a focus on networking this time around. Between each informative session was a good amount of time for a break. The breaks allowed time for the vets to chat and exchange information. Several times, vets remarked that they found a solution to a problem they had been having just by chatting during breaks to others who were in the same situation and had found a way through.

Throughout the WVER event, women were pulled away for glam sessions. The makeup brand Lancôme volunteered their services and products to do hair and makeup for all who wished to participate. Lancôme did a photo session and interviews with some of the women as well. At the end, each woman got to keep the lipstick, gloss, and mascara that had been used to create their look.

Other fun activities this year included a paint and sip event where the women were able to sip mock tails and follow a guided painting tutorial of Rosie the Riveter. As a final evening close out, there was a 1930s USO themed event where the women dressed up in themed outfits, had dinner, and hung out listening to music and chit chatting.



Great Plains National Director Attends Mid-Winter BOD Meeting

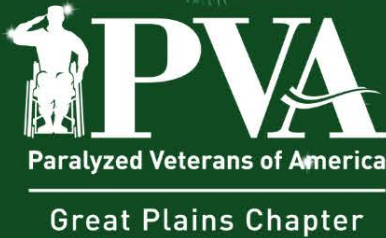
Great Plains PVA National Director, Dave Nelson, attended the PVA Mid Winter Board meeting in Orlando. Our chapter President and Executive Director also joined the meeting virtually to keep up-to-date with PVA business that was discussed. They also attended the Chapter Presidents and EDs training that followed the meeting.



PVA Member Seth Kotouc Participates in Council Bluffs Veterans Day Parade

Great Plains PVA Board member Seth Kotouc represented our chapter in the Council Bluffs Veterans Day Parade.





Christmas Party

December 6th | 6:00 pm
at Great Plains PVA

Come dressed in red or green
to get extra raffle tickets!

Dinner | Bingo | Raffle Prizes

RSVP to Amanda by 12/1 at
vazquez@greatplainspva.org.

(& tell us the number of kids
coming with you!)

Veterans Day Poster & Poem Contest

by Amanda Vazquez

Great Plains PVA hosted its annual Veterans Day Poster & Poem Contest for children in grades 1-8. Throughout October, children submitted a poster (1st-4th graders) or poem (5th-8th graders) to be entered into the contest. We received a record number of posters and poems this year, totaling over 300 submissions to consider! This is one of my favorite events and I really enjoy seeing the creativity and depth of thought that so many students portray in their art.

Great Plains PVA members and Auxiliary voted on their favorite submissions, keeping the theme - Accessibility for All - central to their decisions. Great Plains National Director, Dave Nelson, helped present the awards to students from St. Wenceslaus Catholic School and Sandoz Elementary. Congratulations to the winners whose artwork is pictured below! Special thanks to all of the students who participated and to the teachers who took the time to talk with their students about veterans, the importance of accessibility, and for encouraging their students throughout this contest.



Grand Prize Winners

Clara M., 8th Grade

Dorothy N., 2nd Grade

PVA Poem

Don't they deserve to see
What you and I see so easily?

Somebody's cousin, sister, brother
Somebody's father, friend, or mother

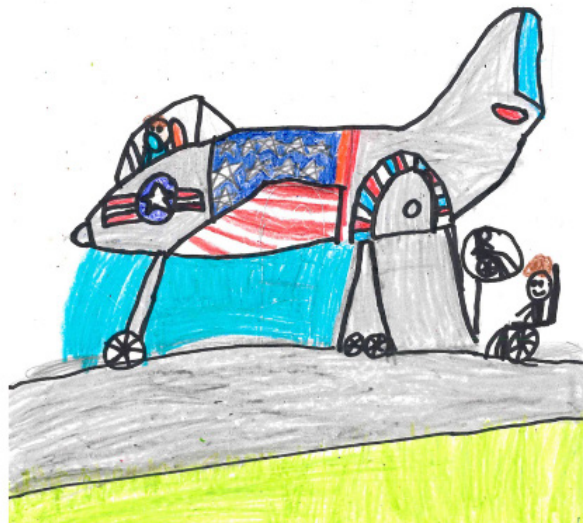
They gave a sacrifice for you
To protect the red, white, and blue

You could change their lives a lot,
With a simple parking spot

Everybody can be a champ,
If they add a little ramp

Put the elevator near the door,
You can do so much more

When you notice that they can't walk around,
Please don't look down



7th/8th Grade Category

Emmy P., 8th Grade

5th/6th Grade Category

Simon R., 6th Grade

Our wounded veterans deserve respect
our great country they did protect.
They served us day and night
Even when danger was left and right.
We will never understand the price they paid
But now it's our turn to give them aid.
We must make the world more accessible
For they have done the impossible.
They have proved they are dedicated to our country
And they fight for us so that we may be free.

A daily struggle
After all your trouble
After all this pain
So please explain
Why can't there be accessibility for all?
It makes my skin crawl
Every day shouldn't be a challenge
Getting to your car
Opening a door
Even just getting down to first floor
So Please,
All we ask
It's just one simple task
#Accessibility For All

3rd/4th Grade Category - 2 winners

Caroline C., 3rd Grade



Wrenly G., 3rd Grade



1st/2nd Grade Category

Susana L., 2nd Grade



Layla J., 3rd Grade - Honorable Mention



*by Patrick Reynolds, Sports Director***October Challenge Format and Results**

The October Challenge was a revised version of the 2024 WheelWod Games Event One. This is a chipper of three machines to test cardio/local muscular endurance. Travis Hasenkamp crushed this workout, winning by almost two minutes. He was the outlier; everyone else was within fifty seconds of each other. Below are the formats and leaderboard of the October Challenge:

- **Format**

- Seated One-Arm Rowers
 - For Time:
 - 500 Meter Row
 - 700 Meter Ski
 - 1,200 Meter Handbike
- Seated Two-Arm Rowers
 - For Time:
 - 600 Meter Row
 - 800 Meter Ski
 - 1,440 Meter Handbike
- Standing
 - For Time:
 - 1,000 Meter Row
 - 1,000 Meter Ski
 - 50 Calorie Echo Bike

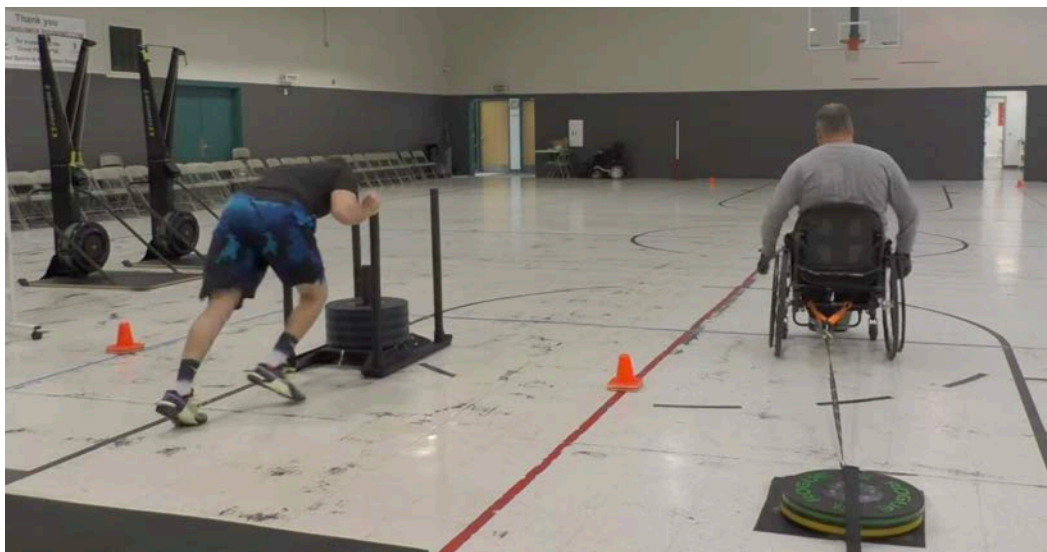


- **Results**

- 1. Travis Hasenkamp – 11:58
- 2. Daniel Schmitt – 13:39
- 3. Barry Ridout – 13:53
- 4. Chris Parnell/Tim Hobbs – 14:07
- 6. Bruce Froendt – 14:29

2024 Team Competition

I don't think I can overstate how much I enjoy the team competition. There's something special about people working together to complete workouts, more so than going at it individually. This year's teams will be Travis Hasenkamp/Chris Parnell, Tim Hobbs/Daniel Schmitt and Barry Ridout/Bruce Froendt. I will post the events and results on our Facebook page (Great Plains PVA Fitness) under the events tab, if you are inclined to follow along. I will also post every video on our YouTube channel (Great Plains PVA Adaptive Fitness), along with most other workouts we do in our gym. Good luck to our teams competing, you're probably going to need it!



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Upcoming Events

November

- 8th-9th: Adapted Cornhole Clinic & Tournament
- 11th: Veterans Day - *Thank you for your service!* | Poster & Poem Contest Winners Announced
- 14th: BOD Meeting 1:00pm
Volunteer Appreciation Night 6:00-9:00pm
- 28th: Happy Thanksgiving!

December

- 5th: General Membership Meeting 11:00am
- 6th: Chapter Christmas Party 6:00pm
- 12th: BOD Meeting 1:00pm
- 25th: Merry Christmas!
- 31st: New Year's Eve

January

- 1st: Happy New Year!
- 9th: BOD Meeting 1:00pm
- 20th: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

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

CHAPTER BIRTHDAYS

November

Andrea Banicki * Travis Sterns * Kelly Wubbels * Gregory Peterson * Patrick Fraenza *
John Scott * Lenora Kenwolf * Matthew McCullor * Mark Linquist * Robert Compton *
Ruth Pike * Leanne Irsik * Alan Mann * Tommy Hefley * Jackie Denker * James Moran

December

Garret Wiley * Shayna Goerdt * Stormy Brandt * Renee Barnes * Thomas Gerber *
Daniel Wick * Alexander Tomic * Richard Collins

January

Mark Zulkoski * James Tichota * Shawn Stencil * Charles Fattig * Jerry Trumble *
David Burgess * Kim Hanson * Charles Geffen * Daniel Kurtenbach * Richard Cornett *
Ronald Hendryx



Washington Update

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

HOUSE PASSES VETERANS OMNIBUS BILL

For months, PVA has been urging Congress to pass the Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act to ensure the protections and resources our catastrophically disabled veterans and their caregivers need are put into place without delay. Late last year, House and Senate leaders decided to roll the measure into a larger omnibus package addressing a wide variety of veterans-related issues. The new bill, the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act (H.R. 8371), sought to enhance and reform the delivery of healthcare, benefits, and services at the VA.

Normally, creating an omnibus bill enhances chances of passage, but the package stalled quickly when disagreements arose over several provisions in the bill. Last week, the leaders of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees worked through the differences which had been holding the bill up since May, allowing for a successful House vote on November 18.

The bill, which easily passed the chamber by a vote of 389 to 9, will make critically needed improvements to VA's Home and Community Based Services, such as lifting the department's cap on the amount they can pay for home care from 65 to 100 percent, increasing access to the Veteran Directed Care program, and improving support to caregivers of veterans. In addition to raising

the cap to 100 percent, the VA could even exceed the 100 percent rate if the Secretary determines certain factors require the higher cost in the best interest of the veteran or if that veteran has amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, a spinal cord injury, or a similar condition. Any one of these changes would provide severely disabled and aging veterans with more and better options to receive their care at home rather than in a facility.

Another section of the bill would allow VA to cover the cost of some veterans' care at private assisted living facilities. Currently, VA is able to refer veterans to these facilities, but they can't pay for it. The bill directs the department to create a three-year pilot program in two Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISN), with at least one program site in a rural area and another serving a State Veterans Home to test the benefit of having VA pay for this care. Veterans eligible for the pilot would include those already receiving nursing home-level care paid for by the VA and those who are eligible to receive assisted living services or nursing home care. At the conclusion of the pilot program, participating veterans will be given the option to continue receiving assisted living services at their assigned site, paid for by the VA. We believe this would help veterans and the VA alike by giving greater access to assisted living and reducing costs for long-term care, allowing more veterans to receive needed assistance. Other provisions in H.R. 8371 would streamline VA information sources for veterans and caregivers alike,

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ensure a warm handoff to other VA programs if a veteran is not eligible for VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers, and create mental health care grants for certain caregivers who become strained by the demands of assisting veterans with heightened needs.

In response to the House's passage of the omnibus legislation, PVA National President Robert Thomas said, "Improving access to home and community-based services is crucial to the health and well-being of our wounded, ill, and injured veterans and their caregivers." President Thomas urged the Senate to quickly pass the bill. PVA members are encouraged to use [PVAAction Force](#) to urge their two senators to support its swift passage.

FORMER REP. DOUG COLLINS TO BE NOMINATED FOR VA SECRETARY

President-Elect Trump has announced that he intends to nominate former Rep. Doug Collins (R-GA) to be the next VA Secretary. Collins is a veteran and colonel in the Air Force Reserve where he serves as a chaplain. He served in Congress as a U.S. Representative from 2013 to 2021.

Following the announcement, Collins stated on X, "We'll fight tirelessly to streamline and cut regulations in the VA, root out corruption, and ensure every veteran receives the benefits they've earned." He further said, "Together, we'll make the VA work for those who fought for us. Time to deliver for our veterans and give them the world class care they deserve."

UPDATE ON VA FUNDING SHORTFALL

At the end of September, Congress approved, and the President signed, H.R. 9468, the Veterans Benefits Continuity and Accountability Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2024. This legislation provided an additional \$2.9 billion in funding to pay veterans' pension and disability benefits for fiscal year (FY) 2024. The legislation did not address the \$12 billion healthcare shortfall VA previously identified for FY 2025.

On November 1, the Veterans Benefits Administration revealed that it carried over approximately \$5.1 billion from FY 2024 to FY 2025, including the supplemental funding appropriated by Congress in September. This means that VA did not need to receive any additional funding to pay benefits timely on October 1.

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) showed that VA was able to carry over from FY 2024 to FY 2025 approximately what was anticipated in VA's FY 2025 budget request. However, VHA acknowledged that they limited the purchases of new equipment and that the cost of the workforce was lower than expected. Community care also grew at a lower rate. VHA further noted that their efforts to reduce costs are not sustainable and they still require additional funding in this calendar year.

On November 20, Under Secretary for Health Dr. Shereef Elnahal and Under Secretary for Benefits Josh Jacobs testified before the House Appropriations Military Construction/VA Subcommittee regarding VA's funding shortfall. Under Secretary Elnahal testified that VHA's shortfall for FY 2025 is not \$12 billion as previously reported. He confirmed, however, that additional funding will be needed to facilitate hiring and other VHA priorities.

Congress has yet to decide on a strategy for keeping the government funded beyond December 20. This news leads to serious questions about VA's management of its funding and the department's failure to adequately forecast its financial needs. It also presents significant challenges to VA's request for additional funding for VHA.

PVA SUPPORTS WOMEN VETERANS AND SERVICEMEMBER CAUCUS EVENT ON CAPITOL HILL

On November 20, PVA Associate Legislative Director Julie Howell participated in an informational session held by the Service Women and Women Veteran Congressional Caucus. Comprised of elected officials, Department of Defense fellows, and other people passionate about military and veteran affairs, the

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Caucus holds open events to educate audiences about the unique experiences and needs of women veterans.

November's event focused on the transition from military service to veteran status and included speakers from the American Legion, VFW, and PVA. Key takeaways were the need for increased mental health support in combating veteran suicide, the need to ensure early access to VA benefits for transitioning service members through the benefits due at discharge program, and the need for improved accountability in accessing Transition Assistance Program (TAP) curriculum a year before discharge.

PVA highlighted the disparities experienced by servicemembers who may be discharged due to illness or injury and the critical need for improved supports and services for them. Often when a servicemember separates from the military due to injury or illness they are denied access to critical support programs such as Skill Bridge which provides on the job training in a field of interest for the servicemember. Additionally, PVA stressed the need for improved mental health support for personnel who were forced to leave the military due to their health.

ACCESS BOARD REQUIRES CORRECTIVE ACTION AFTER RECEIVING OVER 340 NEW ABA COMPLAINTS

On October 18, the U.S. Access Board announced that it has resolved 85 complaints after finding facilities did not meet accessibility standards.

The Access Board is responsible for enforcing the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 (ABA). Under the ABA, buildings designed, built, altered, or leased with federal funds are required to be accessible to and usable by people with disabilities. From October 1, 2023, to September 30, 2024, the Access Board received 341 ABA complaints and resolved 265 of them. The Access Board resolved 85 of the complaints after mandating federal agencies remove accessibility barriers. The Access Board reported that 17 ABA complaints filed as a result of barriers within the VA and the Department of Defense were successfully resolved.

ABA complaints should be filed if you are aware of or encounter an accessibility barrier at a covered facility or building. Covered facilities include VA medical facilities, Social Security Administration offices, U.S. post offices, national parks, federal office buildings, U.S. courthouses, public housing units, and mass transit systems built or altered with federal grants or loans. Complaints can be filed by using the Access Board's [online ABA complaint form](#). More information is available [here](#).

DOL VETS HOLDS QUARTERLY STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

In early November, the Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service (DOL VETS) held their quarterly briefing for military and veterans service organizations to update them on the department's efforts to expand access to employment supports and services for veterans. The main focus of the briefing was to share information about the 10th anniversary of the National Apprenticeship Week, with daily attention spent on youth and young adult apprenticeships, new and emerging industries around the globe, expansions of apprenticeships to underserved populations, women in apprenticeships, and opportunities for veterans.

DOL VETS also provided updated statistics around their employment navigator partnership program (ENPP), which helps connect the military community to employment assistance. More than 17,000 transitioning servicemembers used the ENPP this year and more than 1,000 military spouses. Additionally, DOL shared that more than 11,500 participants enrolled in the wounded warrior and caregiver employment workshop, which is available to transitioning servicemembers who are ill or injured, as well as their caregivers.

The veteran unemployment rate for October was 3 percent compared to non-veteran unemployment which was 4.1 percent. Women veterans saw an unemployment rate of 3.7 percent and disabled veteran unemployment was 6 percent.

DOJ ANNOUNCES SETTLEMENT WITH CHICAGO CUBS

On October 31, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ)

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announced it entered a settlement agreement and proposed a consent decree with the Chicago Cubs after alleged disability discrimination. In 2022, DOJ filed a lawsuit alleging the Cubs failed to ensure Wrigley Field was appropriately accessible for individuals with disabilities, including wheelchair users, as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). At the time the department filed the lawsuit, the team was undertaking a multi-year renovation and reconstruction of Wrigley Field, the “1060 Project.” The department reported the Chicago team failed to ensure wheelchair-using patrons were provided adequate sightlines as compared to non-wheelchair-using patrons, and also failed to remove architectural barriers in other areas of the stadium. Sports venues are required to ensure that alterations and constructions comply with the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design.

Under the consent decree, the Cubs have agreed to: remove and replace noncompliant wheelchair spaces and companion seating; incorporate wheelchair spaces and companion seating into premium club areas; modify protruding objects along circulation paths; provide compliant parking and shuttle services; and provide internal training on ADA and the settlement before each of the next three baseball seasons. The Department may review compliance with the settlement during that time.

DOJ IMPROVES ACCESS TO COMMUNITY INTEGRATION FOR ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES IN COLORADO

On November 1, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) announced it had entered into a settlement agreement with the state of Colorado. The settlement follows a lawsuit from DOJ alleging Colorado failed to ensure community services were available to people with physical disabilities. DOJ issued the complaint after a multi-year investigation led to the lawsuit. DOJ complaints from Coloradans showed a desire by people with disabilities to live in their communities but they were stuck in Colorado nursing facilities. Along with allegations of disability discrimination against nursing facilities, the complaints alleged the state’s policies and practices made it difficult for them to move back to their homes, violating Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Title II’s integration mandate requires public entities to administer services in a setting that enables individuals with disabilities to interact with nondisabled people to the fullest extent possible. The U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in *Olmstead v. L.C.* prohibits unjustified segregation of individuals with disabilities. Title II and the *Olmstead* decision require public entities to provide community-based services when they are appropriate, affected individuals do not oppose and the community-based services can be reasonably accommodated. Most Colorado nursing home residents and their families were not aware they could receive services in their communities. Among other commitments, under the settlement agreement, Colorado has agreed to: assist nursing facility residents in moving back to their communities; provide information needed to make informed choices to residents and families; support family caregivers; and expand and improve services that assist people with finding and keeping affordable, accessible housing in their community.

NEWS OF NOTE

House Passes VERY Act

On November 18, Congress passed H.R. 7653, the Veterans Employment Readiness Yield (VERY) Act. The VERY Act will make a simple one-page technical fix to the Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) program that would replace “employment handicap” with “employment barrier” and the term “serious employment handicap” with “serious employment barrier” while leaving the definitions unchanged. The terms “employment handicap” and “serious employment handicap” are used to describe servicemembers and veterans eligible for and entitled to certain benefits and services. However, the word “handicap” is outdated, has a negative connotation in the disability community, and does not adequately represent veterans. Updating terminology will allow for improved efficiency and encourage disabled veterans to use the VR&E program.

MST Claims Backlog Continues to Grow

Earlier this month, PVA joined other veterans service

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organizations (VSO) for a military sexual trauma (MST) briefing by the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA). PVA and several other VSOs have concerns about the growing backlog of MST claims. The backlog is currently at 37,000 claims. VBA has seen a 25 percent increase in caseload this year and they're capable of processing 200 claims a day due to an increased workforce. PVA members are urged to contact their members of Congress in support of the [Servicemembers and Veterans Empowerment and Support Act \(SAVES\) of 2023 \(H.R. 2441/S. 1028\)](#), which will ensure improved access to benefits and care for MST survivors.

Continuation of Veteran Directed Care Available for Eligible Hospitalized Veterans

Did you know veterans who require continuation of Veteran Directed Care services during inpatient hospitalization can receive this service upon authorization by VA Central Office? If you are hospitalized at VA, and will require the assistance of your caregiver, request to speak with a VA Geriatric and Extended Care Social Worker. Ask the social worker to fill out a Veteran Directed Care Inpatient Hospital Support Request. Once the form is completed, the social worker will need to submit it to VA Central Office for approval. Please contact a PVA national service officer for assistance.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

Veterans' Committee Activities

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

PVAAction Force



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 these issues.



Paralyzed Veterans of America

Great Plains Chapter



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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.