



# Washington Update

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

[WATCH National President Robert Thomas' testimony before a Joint Session of the VA Committees](#)  
March 4 at 10:00 AM ET

## VA BACKTRACKS ON DISABILITY BENEFITS IFR

On February 27, VA officially withdrew an interim final rule (IFR) that would have changed the way they calculate disability evaluations for compensation purposes. Under the IFR, which was issued on February 17, examiners conducting medical evaluations were to look at a veteran's level of impairment and evaluate the disability and include the effects of medication or treatment. Since the change was issued as an IFR, it was to have applied to veterans filing disability claims or appeals on or after February 17 and those seeking any changes to their disability ratings after that date.

Significant backlash from veterans and multiple veterans organizations, [including PVA](#), followed the release of the IFR. As a result, VA issued a statement on February 19 announcing that the rule would "not be enforced at any time in the future." Now that VA has officially rescinded the IFR, the issue is moot. However, the court decision that originally led VA to issue the IFR is still on appeal. PVA will continue to work to ensure that veterans'

benefits are not harmed. This is a great example of veterans' voices making a difference.

## PVA SUBMITS A JOINT COMMENT EMPHASIZING THE IMPORTANCE OF ENFORCEMENT OF THE ACAA

On January 6, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) issued a notice of proposed guidance. The notice included a proposal to revise and update the investigatory and enforcement policies of DOT, including monetary fines, for non-compliance with aviation consumer protection requirements. This includes requirements under the Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA), which prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in commercial air travel. Rather than issuing monetary penalties against air carriers, the proposed guidance outlined first steps DOT would take. This included sending warning letters to help the air carrier comply with legal requirements before engaging in enforcement actions. The proposed guidance reiterated that DOT would focus on ensuring compliance rather than assessing penalties.

Recently, PVA and other veterans and disability rights organizations submitted a joint comment emphasizing the importance of monetary penalties and enforcement



actions for violations of the ACAA. The comments explained that air carriers are currently not taking adequate affirmative steps to ensure passengers with disabilities are treated with dignity and respect nor providing assistance in a safe and dignified manner. Despite the passage of the ACAA in 1986, thousands of violations are reported each year. The joint comments underscored that warning letters were insufficient to ensure compliance with the ACAA and monetary penalties and enforcement actions are sometimes necessary.

### **HVAC SUBCOMMITTEE HOLDS MARKUP**

On February 24, the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee for the House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC) held a markup covering a broad range of bills. All of the bills considered were previously included in a pending legislation hearing.

Several of the bills were nonconfrontational and passed "en bloc," meaning they were voted out of the subcommittee without any offered amendments. The bills passed en bloc included several pieces of legislation that PVA previously testified in support of, including legislation that will prohibit schools from withholding transcripts for student veterans using the Post 9/11 GI Bill and require the VA secretary to provide a quarterly report on the number of home loans insured or guaranteed by the VA. Other legislation included the End Veterans Homelessness Act and the Veteran Education Assistance Adjustment Act, which will increase the amount available through the Post 9/11 GI Bill book stipend and tie it to an inflationary index, guaranteeing an annual increase for students if costs grow in the future.

Several bills were considered for debate and amendments, which included a bill related to caps on flight training and the centralization of adaptive automobile payments. Other bills focused on increasing the guarantee amount of a VA home loan, increasing access to co-ops, and improving outreach information related to the Servicemember Civil Relief Act.

All of the bills will now advance to a full committee markup yet to be scheduled. You can watch the markup [here](#).

### **SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING EXAMINES DISABILITY ACCESS BILL**

On February 12, the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining held a hearing to examine bills related to public land management, conservation, and mineral policies. The legislation covered a wide range of topics, including wildfire mitigation, economic development, land conveyances, and motorized access to public lands.

Among the bills considered was [S. 2968](#), the Outdoor Americans with Disabilities Act. Among other things, the bill would define disability-accessible land as one square mile with at least 2.5 miles of authorized roads accessible to motorized vehicles or offroad vehicles. The bill would also require federal land managers to designate motorized vehicle routes and not allow the managers to close roads that would disqualify land from "disability-accessible" status, regardless of impacts to wildlife habitats and cultural sites.

You can find a recording of the hearing and all related documents [here](#).

### **HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ADVANCES LEGISLATION ON AVS AND AUTOMATED WHEELCHAIR SECUREMENT SYSTEMS**

On February 10, the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade held a markup on a number of bills, including the SELF DRIVE Act (H.R. 7390), which covers autonomous vehicles (AVs). The bill encompasses laws and regulations related to the design, construction, and performance of automated driving systems by encouraging the testing and deployment of AVs. However, the act has no requirements for wheelchair accessible AVs.





Another bill, the Motor Vehicle Modernization Act of 2026 (H.R. 7389), requires a study on automated wheelchair securement systems. These systems could potentially be used in AVs to allow wheelchair users to independently use the vehicle. The bill requires the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) to conduct a study on automated wheelchair securement systems in motor vehicles. DOT would be required to submit a report within three years that included an analysis of the feasibility of incorporating these automated wheelchair securement systems. After the markup, the subcommittee forwarded both bills to the full committee for further consideration.

### **PVA SUBMITS COMMENTS TO DOT RFI ON FIVE YEAR RESEARCH STRATEGIC PLAN**

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) published a [request for information](#) (RFI) seeking comments on its development of a five year transportation research and development strategic plan to guide future transportation research and development activities. The RFI sought comments regarding research, including projects that could improve mobility of people and promote safety. PVA submitted [comments](#) that requested DOT to research safe and reliable transportation for mobility device users.

PVA recommended projects included research into wheelchair accessible autonomous vehicles and automated wheelchair securement systems; wheelchair accessible advanced air mobility, such as air taxis; opportunities for passengers to travel in a commercial aircraft in their personal wheelchairs; improving paratransit; and methods that could improve the safety of pedestrians who use mobility devices.

### **VA OIG RELEASES SPECIAL DISABILITIES CAPACITY REPORT**

On February 23, the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) issued a report titled, "Independent Review of VA's Special Disabilities Capacity Report for Fiscal Year 2023." The OIG found that while VA's reporting on its ability to provide specialized care to veterans with catastrophic disabilities, including spinal cord injuries and disorders

(SCI/D), was generally accurate, persistent omissions and structural limitations limit Congress's ability to determine whether VA is maintaining the capacity required by law.

Critically for PVA members, the report does not capture services veterans receive through community care or the extent to which VA SCI/D bed capacity is utilized within VA facilities. The absence of utilization and community care data prevents policymakers from determining whether in-house care is being gradually replaced by outsourced services. OIG also cautioned that ongoing implementation of VA's new electronic health record system has resulted in missing or inconsistent workload data at some facilities, which may complicate comparisons of SCI/D staffing and patient volume across Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) as deployment expands through fiscal year 2026.

You can read the full report [here](#).

### **GAO PUBLISHES NEW REPORT ON WIOA**

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) published a report on February 20 focused on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The report highlighted that actions are needed to ensure people with disabilities can access jobs through the Department of Labor's (DOL) programs.

Between 2021 and 2024, more than 500,000 people with disabilities were unemployed but actively looking for work each year. People with disabilities often need workplace accommodations, like assistive technology, to access DOL-funded employment programs at various employment centers, such as the American Job Centers.

GAO found that while DOL monitors its programs and provides accessibility guidance to employment centers, it doesn't routinely analyze or monitor results or evaluate the use of the guidance it provides. Nearly seven percent of the participants during the time analyzed by GAO were people with disabilities and they had worse employment outcomes than their non-disabled counterparts. GAO found that the data collected by states is lacking and the data varied widely

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between states.

GAO made several recommendations. First, DOL should take additional steps to collect more comprehensive data on workforce program participants' disability types. Next, they should develop written procedures for routinely analyzing DOL's state monitoring reports to identify widespread issues with accessibility and a plan to address them. Finally, DOL should evaluate state and local workforce agencies' awareness and use of guidance and technical assistance to ensure accessibility of workforce programs.

You can read the full report [here](#).

### **VA'S OFFICE OF WOMEN'S HEALTH HOLDS STAKEHOLDER BRIEFING**

The VA's Office of Women's Health held their first briefing of the year after sustained pressure from the veterans community for updates. Dr. Sally Haskell, the Acting Director of the Office of Women's Health, shared a comprehensive update on women's health. Updates included VA's new self-referral process for women veterans needing gynecological care. This means women veterans will no longer need a referral from their primary care provider. This is intended to reduce the time and bureaucracy that veterans encounter when scheduling gender specific medical appointments.

Also on the briefing was Ms. Jacquelyn Hayes-Byrd, the Executive Director for the Center for Women Veterans (CWV). Ms. Hayes-Byrd shared that the CWV is planning several stakeholder meeting sessions across the country, beginning next year, to connect with women veterans where they are. The VA now has more than a million women veterans enrolled and their goal is to continue to bring more women veterans into the fold.

For those interested in following announcements from the CWV, you can check out their website [here](#).

## **NEWS OF NOTE**

### **Senate Caregiver Roundtable**

On February 18, National Legislative Director Morgan Brown and Associate Legislative Director Jennifer Hunt participated in a roundtable convened by the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee to discuss the status of the proposed rule to amend the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC). The proposed rule was published for comment on December 6, 2024, but VA has made no updates to the program thus far. PVA supports reform and expansion of the PCAFC but believes VA's current approach is still too restrictive and misaligned with the intent of the MISSION Act, which expanded the program beyond the Post 9/11 cohort.

### **VA Education Services Holds First Stakeholder Engagement Call**

After months of pressure, the VA's Education Services team held their first stakeholder engagement call in more than a year. The VA shared an update on the continued digital GI Bill modernization, and they discussed attending the Student Veterans of America National Conference, where they helped several hundred students with issues related to their education benefits. Veterans organizations will continue to ask VA to hold these calls on a more frequent basis, so that we can update our members on developments related to VA education benefits.

## **PVACTION FORCE, WEBINARS, AND COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES**

### **New PVAction Force Campaigns**

Recently, a few key bills of importance to PVA members were introduced in Congress. Those bills are H.R. 6001, the Veterans with ALS Reporting Act, which would require the VA to report on ALS incidence among veterans and develop risk-reduction strategies; H.R. 6835, the Veterans STAND Act, which would direct the VA to provide annual preventative health evaluations for veterans with spinal cord injuries and disorders and expand access to assistive technologies; and S. 3647, the Disabled Veterans Dignity Act, which would codify VA's



Bowel and Bladder program. Congress needs to hear from you about the importance of this legislation. Head over to [PVAction Force](#) and message your legislators asking them to sign on in support of these bills and more.

### **Webinar: Accessibility of Federal Facilities—An Overview of the ABA**

Join us on March 19 at 2:00 p.m. ET as we explore accessibility under the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA). Travis Saner, Accessibility Specialist, U.S. Access Board will discuss the essentials of federal facility accessibility under the ABA, from entrances and signage to restrooms and assembly areas.

To register, 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.

