

The Wheeled Herald

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Information Seminars with PVA NSO



Our chapter is very fortunate to have a National Service Officer (NSO) who cares about veterans and works hard to ensure they receive the care and benefits they have earned. Mike Sheets, Eastern Region Director with PVA's Veterans Benefits department, serves as PVA's NSO for Nebraska.

In February, Great Plains PVA hosted an information seminar that Mike put together on VA benefits for surviving spouses of veterans. There are so many things

that surviving spouses may not know, but Mike and his team have done a fantastic job of pulling together those pieces so they can help ensure that a surviving spouse is taken care of with the resources that VA offers as they navigate through a difficult and emotional time.

Great Plains PVA staff highly encourages PVA members to utilize PVA's NSO network. These staff, and particularly Mike, are invaluable resources who help veterans navigate a complex system and keep your best interests at heart. And, all of the services that NSO's offer are completely free of charge.



President's Message *by Randy Squier*



With the spring comes warmer weather and a renewed focus on the activities of the year. We have already had a few gatherings that focus on caregivers who help us get through the day. A few of us would struggle without that supportive element. I know that I'm grateful for the caregivers in my life.

In an effort to support our billiards tournament in August, we've decided to add a billiards league starting in April at Big John's Billiards in Omaha. For those of you that enjoy playing pool, think about joining us on Friday afternoons at 2pm for the league play. We still have the chapter pool table available on different days for you to play other than Friday. Check with the chapter for availability. Our bowling league at Mockingbird Lanes in Omaha is in full swing. Everyone seems eager for play on Wednesdays at 1pm. This year could be my year. Let us know if you'd like to check it out!

The preparation for this year's golf tournament fundraiser is well under way. Our focus is to make this event one of the highlights of our year as always. We thank everyone in advance for helping us make that possible and the best it can be. The support from the community is awesome. Many of our PVA members with our devoted staff will be working that event to highlight the opportunities that this golf tournament fundraiser provides. We're looking forward to a beautiful sunny Sunday in June and the opportunity to shine.

April is PVA Awareness Month. It's a great time to share PVA with you and our community. As part of Paralyzed Veterans of America Great Plains Chapter, I have been blessed with the friendships of PVA and the expertise it brings to SCI/D. I'm sure that a lot of us would not be the person we see in the mirror without their help in some way.

I hope you all enjoy your spring and summer and perhaps will find time to join us and enjoy a few of our activities. As always, 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

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PVA
Paralyzed Veterans of America
Great Plains Chapter

SAVE THE DATES
2025 EVENT SCHEDULE

FEB 23	Caregiver Benefits Seminar with PVA NSO
MAR 11	MS Zoom with PVA NSO
MAR 22	Ladies Night Out
APR 26	MS Walk - PVA Team
MAY 3	Wine & Roses Fundraiser
JUN 1	Golf Tournament Fundraiser
JUN 26-29	PVA National Bowling Tournament
SEP 19-21	PVA Billiards Tournament

WATCH FOR EMAILS AND INVITATIONS!

✉ VAZQUEZ@GREATPLAINSPVA.ORG ☎ 402-398-1422 🌐 GREATPLAINSPVA.ORG

Executive Director's Report

By Mary Bushman

Dear Members,

In January, the Chapter Board of Directors set its primary goals for 2025. I am happy to update you on progress made toward these goals during the first quarter.

Goal: To enhance programs and services to our Great Plains PVA members living with MS. On March 4th GPPVA members with MS received an online survey created by Great Plains staff members and our chapter's National PVA MS Representative. The intent of the survey is to get a better idea of the interests of our MS members and how we can best engage them in chapter activities. If you received a survey, please take a few moments to give us some honest feedback. On March 11th, the chapter hosted an online zoom with our chapter's National Service Officer (NSO) Mike Sheets. Mike's presentation "Service-Connection and Multiple Sclerosis", included information on VA benefits that may be available for veterans with MS, potential eligibility, and available resources and how to obtain them. On April 26th, the chapter will host a team and information table at Omaha's Walk MS 2025. All proceeds from this walk support the National MS Society. If you are a PVA member with MS, please consider joining us on either the walk or at the table and meet fellow veterans with MS. More information on the walk can be found in this newsletter. Special thanks to GPPVA member Shayna Goerdt for organizing this event and being our PVA Team Captain.

Goal: To acknowledge and support individuals who care for our Great Plains members through a Care-giver Support Series. On February 23rd, Great Plains PVA NSO Mike Sheets hosted an in-person and zoom event for PVA caregivers that focused on surviving spouse benefits available through the VA. On March 22nd the Chapter hosted its second annual Ladies Night Out. The evening was an opportunity to acknowledge and thank the special ladies involved in our chapter as PVA members, caregivers, and volunteers. This year's event featured prizes and food inspired by countries around the world.

Goal: To grow participation and sponsorship of our PVA Billiards Series Tournament. We are continuing our partnership with the National Wheelchair Pool Players Association (NWPA) to offer our 2nd annual PVA Billiards Series tournament. Event information has already gone out to NWPA members across the country. Like last year, the tournament will offer both Wheelchair and MS Divisions. The chapter's PVA Veterans Pool League will start on April 4th at Big Johns Billiards in Omaha. The league will play on Fridays from 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm through the spring and summer in preparation for the PVA Billiards Series tournament on September 19th and 20th. The league cost is \$5 per week.



HELP US STAY CONNECTED!

In an effort to keep our records current, please contact Amanda at the chapter office 402-398-1422 or vazquez@greatplainspva.org with any updates or changes to your email address, mailing address, or phone number. We want to ensure you stay informed of chapter activities, VA health care and benefits changes, and other issues affecting veterans and people with disabilities.

Ladies Night Out: Bingo Around the World

Great Plains PVA held its 2nd Annual Ladies Night event in March for caregivers, women veterans, our Ladies Auxiliary, and other friends of our chapter. This year's theme was Bingo Around the World! Each table featured a centerpiece representing one country, and bingo prizes were gift baskets designed with items from specific countries.

Food, desserts, and drinks were provided and were also themed after some popular dishes from around the world, including Swedish meatballs, tortellini alfredo, a charcuterie board, cheesecake, and baklava.

Everyone who attended filled out a nametag, each with a different country's flag in the corner. Throughout the evening, door prize winners were drawn from a duplicate set of flags, and prizes were also themed from different countries.

Special thanks to PVA member Shayna Goerdts for helping us plan and set up for this fun event! We love the opportunity to care for the ladies who do so much for our members, others, and our chapter.



National MS Society Walk MS Nebraska 2025 Great Plains PVA Team

Sunday, April 26

Site opens: 9am

Ceremony: 9:45am

Walk Begins: 10am

*Join our team!
Registration is free.*

To support the team, you
can register/donate here:



Paralyzed Veterans of America

Great Plains Chapter

Heartland of America Park -
The Riverfront at the Dog Zone
S 8th St & Farnam
Omaha, NE 68102



Wine & Roses

WINE TASTING FUNDRAISER

featuring Name That Tune!

hosted by The Music Bingo People



**Saturday
May 3rd
5-8PM**



at

Great Plains PVA
7612 Maple Street

\$30

Prizes

Hors D'oeuvres
Silent Auction

RSVP by April 25th to Amanda at vazquez@greatplainspva.org or 402-398-1422.



Paralyzed Veterans of America

Great Plains Chapter

**Proceeds benefit the Great
Plains PVA Ladies Auxiliary's
McAleer/Pierce Memorial
Scholarship Fund for
students with disabilities.**

Upcoming Events

April

PVA Awareness Month

1st:	General Membership Meeting	6:30-8:00pm
4th:	Billiards League Begins at Big John's in Omaha *every Friday	2:00-4:00pm
10th:	BOD Meeting	12:00pm
26th:	MS Walk at the Riverfront in Omaha	9:00am

May

3rd:	Wine & Roses Fundraiser	5:00-8:00pm
8th:	BOD Meeting	1:00pm
12th-17th:	PVA National Convention in Austin, TX	
26th:	Memorial Day	

June

1st:	Tee Off & Support Wheelchair Sports Golf Tournament Fundraiser	
10th-12th:	PVA National Advocacy Seminar	
12th:	BOD Meeting	1:00pm
19th:	Juneteenth	

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

CHAPTER BIRTHDAYS

March

Zach Libben * Eric Rudberg * Lindsay Stearns * Chris Holcomb * Richard Kahla * Michael Brown *
William Connor * Michael Warde * Michelle Shupe * Russell Rimovsky * Randolph Squier * Charles
(Chas) Magdanz * David Hebert * Joseph May * Barbara Bailey * Marvin McClaughry * Dale Grub *
Jerry Sandage * Larry Burghardt * Charles Dus * Robert Roskens * Lloyd Russell * Thomas Pollock

April

Tyrell Johnson * Peter Matson * Timothy Abshire * Clifford Leffingwell * Glenn Fretz * Michael Ward *
David Newburn * William Cary * John E. Scott * Thomas Katalenich

May

Brian Steere * Lanna Vestal * Seth Kotouc * Douglas Norwood * Troy Peterson * Alton Woolley

2024 Great Plains PVA Team Competition

Congratulations to Travis Hasenkamp and Chris Parnell on winning our 2024 team competition! Of the 11 scored events, they won 6 en-route to a 62 point victory. Daniel and Tim gave a valiant effort in the final week but came up just short of Barry and Bruce for 2nd place. Below are the event results and final leaderboard of this year's team competition:

- **Final Leaderboard:**
 - Travis & Chris - 1,004 points
 - Barry & Bruce - 942 points
 - Daniel & Tim - 935 points
- **Event Wins**
 - Travis & Chris – Six Wins (Events 1, 2, 5, 8, 9 and 10)
 - Barry & Bruce – One Win (Event 4)
 - Daniel & Tim – Four Wins (Events 3, 6, 7 and 11)

2025 January Challenge Format and Results

Our first monthly challenge of 2025 was a straight-forward, three round couplet. The base workout was 100 monster rope flips and 50 pullups/pulldowns, with variations for others where this wasn't appropriate. Newcomer Matt Ross took home the win on this workout, with a time of 14:11. Below are the formats and leaderboard for the January Challenge:

- **Format**
 - 3 Rounds for Time:
 - 75k VitaGlide, 150 Rope Swings or 100 Monster Rope Flips
 - 50 Pulldowns/Pullups, 12 Lay-to-Stand Rope Climbs or 12 High Rope Pulls
- **Leaderboard**
 - 1. Matt Ross - 14:11
 - 2. Daniel Schmitt - 14:36
 - 3. Travis Hasenkamp - 15:07
 - 4. Barry Ridout - 15:11
 - 5. Chris Parnell - 16:24
 - 6. Tim Hobbs - 17:06
 - 7. Bruce Froendt - 19:45
 - 8. Pete Farrish - 20:23

2025 February Challenge Format and Results

I really like the format of this one, probably going to see it again (and again) in the future. This was a six-round test of uni-lateral pulling and pressing, with the first three rounds left arm only and the last three, right arm only. Travis Hasenkamp notched his first Challenge victory of 2025, besting Ethan Eckelbarger by 29 seconds. Below are the format and leaderboard of the February Challenge:

- **Format**
 - 6 Rounds for Time:
 - Rounds 1-3,
 - Row, Left Arm (6-9 Calories, Depending on Athlete)
 - 15 Shoulder to Overhead, Left Arm
 - Rounds 4-6,
 - Row, Right Arm (6-9 Calories, Depending on Athlete)
 - 15 Shoulder to Overhead, Right Arm
- **Leaderboard**
 - 1. Travis Hasenkamp - 10:06
 - 2. Ethan Eckelbarger - 10:35
 - 3. Daniel Schmitt - 10:40
 - 4. Chris Parnell - 10:47



- 5. Barry Ridout - 11:24
- 6. Matt Ross - 11:33
- 7. Bruce Froendt - 12:56
- 8. Tim Hobbs - 12:58

2025 March Challenge Announcement

So this workout, originally, was just going to be a four round triplet for time. Wanting to add a wrinkle, I made it an AMRAP that included max reps of pulling if/when you finished all four rounds the triplet. You know, anything to make it hurt a little more. Below is the format of the March Challenge:

- **Format**

- As Many Reps As Possible in 10 Minutes:
 - 4 Rounds of,
 - 20 Pulldowns, 20 Ring Rows or 4 High Rope Pulls
 - 20 Bar Dips, 15 Box Dips or 20 Pushups
 - 20 Monster Rope Flips or 20 Lateral Floor Touches
 - Then,
 - Max Pulldowns/Ring Rows or High Rope Pulls in Time Left

Daniel Schmitt and the 2025 WheelWod Games

The opening qualification round to compete at the 2025 world series of adaptive fitness is now in the books, and Daniel, as expected, did great. He tied for 2nd worldwide in his division and now prepares for the next stage, which will be a series of scored events in the second week of May. We will continue to update everything adaptive fitness via our Facebook, Instagram and YouTube channel if you'd like to follow along with the action.

A Tale of Two ERs: Private vs. VA

by Izzy Abbass, PVA MS Committee Co-Chair

It's been a rough week—I ended up in two different ERs due to a serious infection that caused massive fevers. But through this, I got a firsthand comparison of two healthcare systems.

Monday: Private Sector Hospital

An ambulance rushed me to a private hospital, and I assumed that arriving via ambulance would put me on a fast track. But having worked in Search and Rescue (SAR), I knew triage prioritizes the most critical cases first. They did place me in a room immediately, but then I waited.

And waited.

An hour passed before a nurse came in. Over the next eight hours in the ER, I had minimal interactions with staff. Eventually, they confirmed I had an infection (shocker—I had a 103-degree fever) and administered saline and a single antibiotic. No continued antibiotic course was prescribed. After running four blood labs (twice, because the first set clotted from sitting too long), they admitted they didn't know what was wrong. I barely saw anyone for long stretches—it got so bad I started blasting *Comfortably Numb* by Pink Floyd on my phone, hoping someone might notice. No luck.

Finally, after the second round of labs, they discharged me. I went home, and after two days of slightly lower fevers, I woke up Thursday morning back at 103.

At that point, my wife had enough.

continued...

Thursday: The VA ER

She insisted on taking me to the VA ER, and the experience was night and day.

Despite a waiting room with about 12 others, triage happened quickly, and my initial exam didn't take long. From the start, the ER team—doctors and nurses—were engaged and attentive. I handed them the private hospital's summary from Monday, and the ER doc immediately responded:

"Good, we can rule those out. But we have 15 more tests to run, especially with your MS and weakened immune system."

A few hours later, they identified the root cause, administered two IV antibiotics, and decided to keep me for observation for at least 24 hours. I stayed overnight, with frequent check-ins from nurses and multiple visits from doctors—including one where a physician was accompanied by a supervising doctor to review my case.

A Stark Contrast

To be fair, I've had better experiences at that private hospital before, and I know two neighbors who credit them with saving their lives. This isn't about bashing them. But to anyone who constantly complains about the VA—go private and good luck.

I've always received excellent care at the VA, and in my opinion, it's some of the best available. Maybe I'm biased because of my MS and the incredible team at the Rocky Mountain SCI-D clinic. But if you're someone who wants to privatize the VA—screw you. Seriously. I was in Room K2-125 (I'm out now, but the sentiment remains), and I'd be happy to provide some "Wall-to-Wall Counseling" to help you pull your head out of your full point of contact.

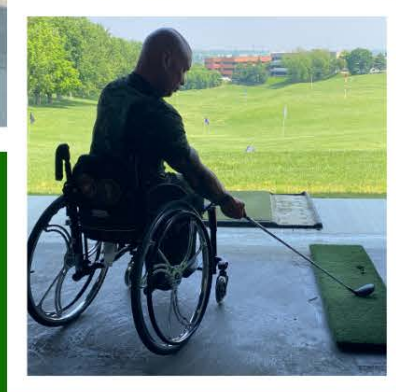
Is the VA perfect? No. No large organization is. But before blaming everything on the VA, take a real look at wait times, misdiagnoses, and care in the private sector. The only reason I got my MS diagnosis was that a civilian hospital misdiagnosed me, recommended an invasive surgery, and then told me I'd have to wait six months to get it. That delay turned out to be a blessing—I sought a second opinion, avoided unnecessary surgery, and got the correct MS diagnosis.

One Thing is Clear: Nurses Deserve More Respect

Across both hospitals, one truth remains: medical staff—especially nurses—don't get enough support or respect. In SAR, we had a saying:

"If I get hurt, don't find me a doctor—find me a nurse, because I want to live."

That still holds true.



VETERANS GOLF LEAGUE

Join this recreational league to practice your golf game in the TopTracer range on simulated courses from around the country. Use traditional clubs or try out our Swingless golf club!



SPRING WEEKLY GOLF LEAGUE

- Mondays 4:00-6:00pm
- \$15 per week
- Practice and play
- Great Plains PVA & Wounded Warrior Project

QUESTIONS?

Email Amanda at
vazquez@greatplainspva.org



Miracle Hill Golf Course
TopTracer Range
1401 N 120th St,
Omaha, NE 68154

BILLIARDS

League



2-4pm

Fridays

Starts April 4th

Cost

\$5

per week

at Big John's Billiards
9819 M St in Omaha

Join for fun, or to help
prepare you for our
tournament in September!

Questions? Email Amanda-
vazquez@greatplainspva.org



Paralyzed Veterans of America

Great Plains Chapter

23rd Annual



Tee Off
& Support
Wheelchair
Sports

Golf Tournament

Join us for Great Plains PVA's
23rd Annual Golf Tournament!

Sunday, June 1, 2025
Tiburon Golf Club, Omaha
9:00am Shotgun Start
\$125/Golfer

**Sign up
today!**



<https://events.golfstatus.com/event/PVAGolf>

*Proceeds support our programs & services for
paralyzed veterans and other adults & children
living with a disability.*

QUESTIONS? CONTACT AMANDA AT VAZQUEZ@GREATPLAINSPVA.ORG

Presenting Sponsor - \$10,000

***1 available**

- logo prominently displayed on event website
- logo prominently displayed on app
- logo on banner at event
- 2 registered golf teams
- social media recognition
- sponsor logo on hole

Pin Flag Sponsor - \$5,000

***3 available**

- logo on event website
- logo on 9 pin flags on one 9-hole course
- 1 registered golf team
- social media recognition
- sponsor logo on hole

Hole-in-One Sponsor - \$2,500

***4 available**

- logo on event website
- logo featured on 1 Hole-in-One hole, recognized on all 4 holes
- 1 registered golf team
- social media recognition
- sponsor logo on hole

Eagle Sponsor - \$1,200

- logo on event website
- 1 registered golf team
- social media recognition
- sponsor logo on hole

Flight Sponsor - \$500

- social media recognition
- Sponsor name on hole

Hole Sponsor - \$250

- Sponsor name on hole

SAVE THE DATE!

PVA Bowling Series Nationals

Hosted by Great Plains PVA

June 26-29, 2025

Mockingbird Lanes in Omaha, NE



\$30,000 Prize Fund!

Singles * Doubles * 3-Person Team * Up/Down Tournament
Goody Bags * Lunches * Raffles * 50/50s * Silent Auction

FEATURING:

More Free Bowling Ball Drawings!
On-Site Pro-Shop Special Offers



Questions: Contact Dave Nelson at 402-208-4841 or dnelson68135@yahoo.com



Washington Update

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

CONGRESS PASSES FULL-YEAR CR FOR FY 2025

On March 14, President Trump signed the Full-Year Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act, 2025 (H.R. 1968). This law funds the federal government through September 30. The continuing resolution (CR) includes an additional \$6 billion for the VA's Toxic Exposure Fund (TEF) to address the shortfall for VA health care for fiscal year (FY) 2025. However, the CR cuts \$800 million from VA facility construction. In addition, the law cuts \$859 million from the Department of Defense budget for the congressionally-directed medical research program, which will affect research related to spinal cord injuries and disorders, such as MS and ALS.

Although the bill includes VA's advance appropriation for FY 2026, the bill did not include \$22.8 billion in funding for the TEF. This sets up a potential shortfall in VA's health care accounts in FY 2026. PVA will continue to closely monitor VA funding to highlight any deficiencies in funding for programs and services focused on paralyzed veterans.

PVA NATIONAL PRESIDENT ROBERT THOMAS, JR. TESTIFIES BEFORE CONGRESS

On March 4, PVA National President Robert Thomas, Jr.

testified before a joint session of the Senate and House Veterans' Affairs Committees regarding PVA's public policy priorities. President Thomas stressed the importance of restoring VA's specialized care services, which are in dire need of adequate funding and staffing, and the vital role that VA-provided care and life-sustaining research play in the lives of PVA members. He also unveiled [PVA's 2025 Policy Priorities](#), which will guide our advocacy efforts throughout the year. The two-panel hearing lasted nearly three hours. You can watch a recording of the hearing [here](#). President Thomas's oral statement begins at the 1:59:00 mark. His full written statement is located [here](#).

While in Washington, D.C., President Thomas and other members of PVA's Executive Committee met with Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Jerry Moran (R-KS) and Ranking Member Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) and House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Mike Bost (R-IL) and Ranking Member Mark Takano (D-CA). During their visits, PVA leaders expressed concerns about the status of the VA's spinal cord injuries and disorders system of care and the effects of current efforts to reduce the size of the federal government. PVA leaders also discussed the importance of long-term services and supports for veterans with catastrophic disabilities and the need for Congress to ensure proper implementation of the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act (P.L. 118-210).



On March 6, President Thomas, National Treasurer Tom Wheaton, and National Vice President Anne Robinson attended an event officially unveiling Capitol Hill's first accessible drop off/pick up zone on the House side. PVA's role in the creation of the zone was reiterated during the curb-side briefing that included Committee on House Administration Chairman Bryan Steil (R-WI), Ranking Member Joseph Morelle (D-NY), Subcommittee on Modernization Chairwoman Stephanie Bice (R-OK), Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-MD), and leaders from the office of the Architect of the Capitol. CEO Carl Blake also participated in the event.

EO SUBCOMMITTEE HOLDS HEARING ON PENDING LEGISLATION

The Economic Opportunity (EO) Subcommittee for the House Veterans' Affairs Committee held a pending legislation hearing on March 11. Julie Howell, Associate Legislative Director, testified on behalf of PVA.

The bills discussed encompassed several pieces of legislation related to VA education benefits and the Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) program, as well as H.R. 1364, the Automotive Support Services to Improve Safe Transportation (ASSIST) Act, which was the biggest priority bill for PVA. The legislation was introduced by Rep. Tom Barrett (R-MI) and Rep. Maggie Goodlander (D-NH).

The ASSIST Act provides a technical fix to the Veterans Auto and Education Improvement Act of 2022 (P.L. 117-333), which allowed catastrophically disabled veterans to receive an additional auto grant and codified certain vehicle adaptations. The ASSIST Act will address issues related to VA approving necessary adaptations for veterans as part of the medical benefits package.

You can watch the hearing [here](#). If you would like to express your support for the ASSIST Act, you can sign our PVAAction Force alert [here](#).

HOUSE COMMITTEE HOLDS HEARING ON WIOA

On March 5, the House Education and Workforce

Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development held a hearing titled, "Strengthening WIOA (Work Innovation and Opportunity Act): Improving Outcomes for America's Workforce." Last Congress, there was broad bipartisan support for the reauthorization of WIOA, which provides career services to individuals looking to return to the workforce, or who are seeking additional training for new employment. While the reauthorization did not pass, efforts are continuing in this Congress to make improvements to WIOA.

The subcommittee discussed the need for improved data and transparency, how artificial intelligence might impact the labor market and overall workforce, and the need to make improvements around coordination with providers and local education providers.

You can watch the hearing [here](#).

SVAC HOLDS LEGISLATIVE HEARING

On March 11, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC) conducted a committee hearing to consider 15 pending pieces of legislation, including the PVA-supported Caring for Survivors Act (S. 611), Improving Veteran Access to Care Act (S. 601), Ensuring VetSuccess on Campus Act (S. 610), and the Love Lives on Act (S. 410). PVA submitted a statement for the record. Representatives from the VA, The American Legion, the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars testified during the hearing. To watch the hearing, please click [here](#).

HEALTH SUBCOMMITTEE HOLDS LEGISLATIVE HEARING

On March 11, the Health Subcommittee of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee held a hearing on pending legislation. PVA submitted a statement for the record. The hearing addressed several pieces of health-related legislation, including the draft bill, the Veterans Supporting Prosthetics Opportunities and Recreational Therapy (SPORT) Act, which would add "adaptive prostheses and terminal devices for sports and other recreational activities" to the statute governing which

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equipment and aids that the VA is allowed to grant veterans.

Also included in the hearing was H.R. 217, the Communities Helping Invest through Property and Improvements Needed or CHIP IN for Veterans Act. The Communities Helping Invest through Property and Improvements Needed for Veterans Act of 2016 (P.L. 114-294), often referred to as the “CHIP IN” Act, authorized the VA to carry out a pilot program under which it may accept up to five donations from nonfederal entities of existing facilities, land, or a facility to be constructed by the donor on real property of the VA. Increasing investment in VA’s infrastructure, particularly facilities that support specialized health care services, is a crucial priority for paralyzed veterans. PVA supports this bill, which would make the CHIP IN pilot program permanent, thus, increasing the availability of health care services to veterans.

You can watch the hearing [here](#).

INTRODUCTION OF THE JUSTICE FOR ALS VETERANS ACT

On February 26, Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) reintroduced the Justice for ALS Veterans Act in the Senate and the next day Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), Co-Chair of the ALS Caucus, reintroduced the bill in the House of Representatives. Veterans are twice as likely to develop ALS compared to the general population, leading it to be a presumptive condition for all veterans regardless of where they served.

Under current law, survivors of veterans who had a disability rating of 100 percent for at least eight continuous years before death receive an additional monthly stipend from the VA. However, with an average life expectancy of only three to five years after diagnosis, ALS veterans often do not survive long enough to meet this requirement—leaving their families without this crucial benefit.

The Justice for ALS Veterans Act (H.R. 1685/ S. 749) would eliminate this unfair restriction and ensure that all families of veterans who pass away from ALS receive this financial support, regardless of the duration of the

veterans’ illness. To read more about this bill, please click [here](#). If you would like to express your support for the legislation, you can sign our PVAAction Force alert [here](#).

NEWS OF NOTE

Bipartisan Credit for Caring Act Introduced

On March 11, Sen. Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV) and Sen. Michael Bennet (D-CO) [reintroduced](#) the PVA-supported [Credit for Caring Act](#) (H.R. 2036/S. 925). This bill would provide eligible and working family caregivers with a federal, non-refundable tax credit for up to \$5,000. The bill would also apply to family caregiving expenses greater than \$2,000. Examples of caregiving-related expenses include home modifications, respite care, home care aides, and adult day care. Family caregivers of all ages, regardless of whether they live with their care recipient, could be eligible for the tax credit.

Voting Rights Advancement Act Reintroduced

On March 5, Rep. Terri Sewell (D-AL) reintroduced [the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act](#) (H.R. 14). This bill would establish a framework to determine which states and localities have had a recent history of discrimination. Those states and localities would then be required to pre-clear new voting laws with the Department of Justice. PVA supports the passage of this bill.

Work Opportunity Tax Credit Act Re-introduced

On February 10, Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-LA) and Sen. Maggie Hassan (D-NH) reintroduced the [Opportunity Tax Credit Act](#). The Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) is a federal tax credit available to employers who hire and employ individuals from groups that have faced significant barriers to employment. Among other things, this bill would update the WOTC, increase the current credit percentage from 40 percent to 60 percent of qualified wages, and add a second level of credit for employees who work 400 or more hours.

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@PVA1946

DOL Secretary Confirmed

Former Rep. Lori Chavez-DeRemer has been confirmed by the Senate to be the Secretary for the Department of Labor (DOL). Secretary Chavez-DeRemer will oversee the department which is home to DOL's Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS). DOLVETS has a particular mission dedicated to veteran employment.

ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS, SURVEYS, & COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

Invitation to Participate in University of Illinois at Chicago Research Study on Air Travel and People with Disabilities

Are you a person with a spinal cord injury who has experience traveling by air? If you are 18 years old or older, you are invited to take part in a University of Illinois at Chicago research study to better understand your air travel experiences, accessibility needs, and barriers to safe and accessible travel. This knowledge will be used to create recommendations for airline and airport personnel training, as well as information resources to facilitate a safe and pleasant travel experience. Your participation would require taking part in a 60-minute interview via phone or a teleconferencing platform (Zoom). You will be compensated \$50 for your time. If you are interested in participating or would like more information, please contact the research assistant for this project at acesstofly@uic.edu.

PVA Needs You – Sign Today!

Over the last couple of years, we have seen VA health care staffing shortages, a lack of investment in infrastructure, and an overall growing trend towards care in the community. In light of our ongoing concerns about changes at the VA, we created an online petition to quantify the need to improve funding and support of the VA's spinal cord injuries and disorders system of care. Over 2,500 individuals have already signed the petition. Click [here](#) to sign your name and show your support. We need veterans, caregivers, and supporters to sign!

Please also take a look at our [2025 PVA Policy Priorities](#) and the issues important to our members. If you are interested in more ways to extend your advocacy efforts, click [here](#) to view our current campaigns on bills we support on our advocacy platform, PVAAction Force. We continue to add more campaigns as additional bills are introduced.

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.



Join PVAction 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.

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Please mention you saw this in your local PVA Chapter's Newsletter

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Paralyzed Veterans of America

Great Plains Chapter



Follow us on Social Media!

@greatplainspva



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www.greatplainspva.org

402-398-1422



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.