

The Wheeled Herald

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Caregiver “Thank You” Pouches Provided for VA SCI Clinic Patients

by Mary Bushman



This past April, Great Plains PVA partnered with the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Healthcare System and provided Caregiver “Thank You” pouches to the SCI Clinic in Omaha. The first 60 pouches were presented to the SCI Clinic team by our members as part of the Chapter’s April’s PVA Awareness Month activities. A total of 250 pouches have been made and will be brought to the Clinic throughout the year. Whenever a caregiver brings a veteran into the SCI Clinic for care, the caregiver will be given a pouch to remind them how important they are to the person they care for. The pouches are inspired by “The Starfish Story” and emphasize how one person can make a difference in the life of another.

The project is part of the Chapter’s Caregiver Support/Appreciation Series being funded by a grant from The Enrichment Foundation. Great Plains PVA recognizes the important role caregivers have in providing for the health and wellness of our members. These individuals have a direct impact on the overall quality of life of our PVA veterans.

Be sure to ask about the pouches the next time you go to the Omaha VA SCI Center for care.

Executive Director's Report

By Mary Bushman

Dear Members,

I am pleased to pass on some very exciting news for our chapter! On May 13th, Great Plains PVA was honored as the recipient of the 2025 National PVA Sports & Recreation Award. The award was announced at the PVA Annual Convention in Austin, TX during the first day of the meetings. The Sports & Recreation award is given annually to the PVA Chapter whose prior year programming best met criteria encompassing scope of sports & recreation programs, member participation, number and type of programs, public awareness, and development of novel programs.

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

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This past year was an incredible year for the Great Plains PVA Sports and Recreation Program. The chapter let our members' interests and passions lead the direction of our sports programs. Under the leadership of our members, and with the support of PVA staff and multiple community partners, existing programs were enhanced and new programs were developed. In 2024, the chapter grew our wheelchair bowling league and elevated our bowling program by hosting the first PVA Bowling Series Nationals. We joined the PVA Billiards Series and hosted a tournament that gave our members the opportunity to compete against poolplayers from across the country. We hosted the city's first adapted cornhole clinic and tournament. We partnered with PGA Hope and provided the first adapted golf series specifically designed for PVA veterans who use wheelchairs. Our Omaha Power Soccer Club brought in new players and play was elevated through the use of professional power soccer chairs. And once again, the Great Plains PVA Adaptive Fitness Program produced one of the top 5 fittest neuro athletes in the world.

The mission of the Great Plains PVA Sports & Recreation Program is to improve the quality of life of paralyzed veterans and other adults and children living with a disability by developing equal opportunities in sports & recreation, especially those activities that enhance lifetime health and fitness. Our programs are designed to identify and enhance an athlete's individual abilities while promoting quality health and wellness, independence, confidence and self-esteem. Please join us in celebrating this award and thank you to all of our members who contribute to the success of our award-winning Sports & Recreation Program!



Onward Presentation at Reeves Foundation Conference March 2025

by Shayna Goerd, MS/Women Vets POC

Tuesday morning was kicked off with keynote speaker with Onward which is a company that has developed ARCEX, ARCIM, and ARCBCI. This presentation focused on ARCEX specifically.

ARCEX is an external stimulation therapy that works in conjunction with OT/PT training to improve hand and arm function in incomplete SCI patients. The ARCEX device is placed on the back of the neck during clinical training sessions three times per week and removed at the end of the sessions. Currently, the device is awaiting FDA approval after showing positive efficacy and no adverse effects aside from those experienced with similar therapies such as redness at the placement site.

Individuals who took part in trials showed instant improvement in hand and arm function, strength, and sensation. Additionally, this device paired with training showed continued functional improvement even after the device was removed.

Presently, ARCEX is only available for clinical use for those with incomplete SCI, but Onward anticipates expanding indications after FDA approval and more provider-led discretionary applications.

Great Plains PVA Ladies Auxiliary

by Peggy Moore, Secretary

As spring moves to summer, the Ladies Auxiliary has been busy with several projects. We have one fundraiser per year to raise funds for the McAleer/Pierce Memorial Scholarship. The scholarship program is named after Jay and Joan McAleer and Jay's relatives, the Pierce family. Jay was a founding member of the Chapter and Joan was instrumental in founding the Auxiliary.

This year we held our Wine and Roses event at the PVA on Saturday, May 3rd. In addition to sampling various types of wine, we offered heavy hors d'oeuvres and desserts. The Auxiliary received many compliments on the food choices, but the attendees were really excited about Auxiliary President, Tammy Squier's Sangria!

In addition to food and drink, members and guests played Name That Tune presented by The Music Bingo People. We included a silent auction with the festivities. We are proud to have raised over \$1,000, enabling us to provide two more scholarships! We hope to see many of you next year.





Washington Update

Check out the [PVAAction Force](#) page to view legislative campaigns and a list of key legislation. [Sign the petition](#) in support of the VA's SCI/D system of care.

SVAC HOLDS HEARING WITH VA SECRETARY

On May 6, VA Secretary Doug Collins made his [first appearance](#) since his confirmation before the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC). In a rather contentious hearing, the VA Secretary made his case for the current state of the department.

Questions from the members often toed the political line with Democrats demanding answers on the announcement of up to 80,000 employees being cut through the proposed reduction in force memo widely circulated back in March. The Secretary told the Senate that VA would perform an analysis of non-critical positions across the department rather than use the proposed 80,000 as a goal. Many of the members urged the Secretary to carefully consider any additional cuts to VA staffing before implementing them.

When pressed about the firing of several thousand VA employees, the Secretary told Senators that those individuals who have been reinstated by the courts have already been returned to their jobs. Senators from both sides of the aisle reminded the Secretary that hiring, firing, and rehiring of critical staff across the VA does not illustrate a stable work environment and that being more considerate with all future cuts should be prioritized.

PRESIDENT SIGNS VETERANS-RELATED EO

On May 9, President Trump signed an Executive Order (EO) titled, "[Keeping Promises to Veterans and Establishing a National Center for Warrior Independence](#)." The order addresses issues related to access to services for homeless veterans and veterans' health care. Specifically, the EO directs the VA Secretary to designate a National Center for Warrior Independence on VA's West Los Angeles campus to address the needs of homeless veterans. It also directs the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development to work with the VA to use housing vouchers to support homeless veterans in Los Angeles and around the country. Another section of the EO addresses accountability of VA employees and directs the Secretary to make full use of the Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act of 2017.

The EO also addresses steps the VA Secretary should take to improve the quality of and increase the options for VA care and services. Specifically, the EO directs the VA Secretary to submit a report to the President with plans to reduce wait times for VA care appointments. The order also directs the Secretary to conduct a feasibility study on expanding services to support a full-service VA medical center (VAMC) in New Hampshire. Currently, New Hampshire is the only state in the



contiguous United States without a full-service VAMC. Finally, the order directs the VA Secretary to work with the Secretary of Defense and the Director of the Office of Management and Budget to develop a strategy to reduce access times and improved service delivery, as well as considering ways to serve veterans at military treatment facilities and military beneficiaries at VA.

THREE BILLS IN PLAY TO INCREASE HISA GRANT AMOUNTS

There are now three separate bills in play that seek to increase the VA's Home Improvements and Structural Alterations (HISA) grant amounts. Each of the three bills are slightly different but all seek to increase the grant amount while also tying the grant to an inflationary index to address increased costs. All three bills contain language which states that veterans who exhausted their HISA benefit before the date of enactment will not be eligible for additional benefits regardless of the increases passed in the legislation.

The first bill, H.R. 2245, the Autonomy for Disabled Veterans Act, introduced by Representatives Don Bacon (R-NE) and Gabe Vasquez (D-NM), increases the grant amount from \$6,800 to \$10,000 for service-connected veterans and increases the amount from \$2,000 to \$5,000 for non-service-connected veterans. This bill ties the grant amount to the Consumer Price Index.

The second bill is H.R. 3309, the Autonomy for All Disabled Veterans Act, introduced by Representatives Eric Sorensen (D-IL), Mark Takano (D-CA), and Nicole Malliotakis (R-NY), which increases the grant amount for service-connected and non-service-connected veterans to \$10,000. This bill ties the grant to a residential home cost of construction index.

Lastly, S. 1644, the Autonomy for Disabled Veterans Act, introduced by Senators Catherine Cortez-Masto (D-NV) and John Boozman (R-AR), increases the grant amount from \$6,800 to \$10,000 for service-connected veterans and increases the amount from \$2,000 to \$6,800 for non-service-connected veterans. The bill also ties the grant to a residential home cost of construction index.

PVA supports any efforts to improve the HISA grant and hopes that Congress will take action this year. You can stay up to date by [visiting PVAction Force](#).

HVAC HOLDS FULL COMMITTEE MARKUP

On May 6, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC) held a full committee markup to review 18 pieces of legislation. The six-hour session covered legislation that mostly focused on health care but there were bills from the Economic Opportunity, Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, and other subcommittees under consideration.

In his opening remarks, HVAC Chairman Mike Bost (R-IL) commented that very few of the more than 40 amendments offered by the minority were received in the 24-hour window that is generally accepted.

The bills that PVA had previously supported that were voted through committee were H.R. 980, the Modernizing the Veterans On-Campus Experience Act of 2025; H.R. 1364, the Automotive Support Services to Improve Safe Transportation (ASSIST) Act of 2025; H.R. 2201, the Improving VA Training for Military Sexual Trauma Claims Act; and H.R. 1041, the Veterans 2nd Amendment Protection Act of 2025.

You can watch the markup and find all relevant documents [here](#).

ADMINISTRATION'S SPENDING PLAN BEGINS TO TAKE SHAPE

The president's annual budget proposal provides detailed information about the government's spending and revenue plans for the upcoming fiscal year (FY). It outlines proposed federal spending, revenue levels, and policy priorities, which are then submitted to Congress for its consideration. It's an important part of the annual budget process because it reveals the administration's fiscal strategy, and it is used to allocate resources for various government functions like the defense of the nation or taking care of veterans.

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The administration's formal FY 2026 budget proposal is still being finalized but the nation received a glimpse of what they intend to propose through a May 2 release of a budget summary commonly referred to as a "skinny budget." Instead of providing all the agency or program levels for each of the 12 funding areas for government operations, it only lists the total amount the administration plans to seek for each of these areas and a short breakdown of key increases and decreases within them. Bear in mind that like the official budget proposal itself, these are simply recommendations, so the numbers it includes are subject to change.

Presently, the administration intends to request \$1.7 trillion in federal spending for FY 2026. The VA, the Department of Defense, and the Department of Homeland Security are the three primary agencies that would receive increases. Looking at the proposed numbers for VA, it raises the department's funding by \$5.4 billion, which is about a four percent increase over the current year's spending levels. But it would be 17 percent if you took into consideration the administration's plan to fully fund (\$50 billion) the Toxic Exposure Fund (TEF) established under the PACT Act (P.L. 117-168).

Drilling down a bit further, the brief proposal adds about \$3.3 billion to VA's healthcare services, which includes a \$1.1 billion increase to fight veterans' homelessness. This, according to the official White House [press release](#) would empower the department to be directly responsible for programs and financial support helping homeless and at-risk veterans with rental assistance, augmenting VA's existing case management and support services, to help veterans get back on their feet.

The administration is also seeking nearly \$2.2 billion for the department's ongoing electronic health records (EHR) project. Facing significant challenges since its inception, the project has been largely stalled since the spring of 2023 while VA and the project contractor worked out serious problems at the six facilities where the new software had been deployed. Last December, [VA](#) indicated many of those problems had been resolved and the department would start rolling out the new EHR to four additional medical centers in mid-2026. Recently, VA increased the [number](#) of facilities to 13, and VA

Secretary Doug Collins made accelerating the VA EHRM rollout one of his top priorities.

The administration's preliminary proposal does look to save money within the department, particularly with Information Technology (IT). In VA alone, there are over 1,000 distinct IT systems. Many of them are aging and in some cases, there are duplicative systems. Overall funding for IT would be reduced by about \$500 million with much of it coming from the elimination of those duplicative systems and pausing new contracts. The skinny budget doesn't give a proposed amount for IT, but it does say the amount the administration would be seeking will protect VA's core mission systems that deliver healthcare, benefits, and cemetery services to America's veterans.

DAMA HOLDS OVERSIGHT HEARING ON REDUCING IMPROPER PAYMENTS IN VA COMPENSATION AND PENSION BENEFITS

On May 14, the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs (DAMA) conducted an oversight hearing to look at VA's efforts to reduce improper payments and excessive paperwork within the compensation and pension benefits program and efforts to reduce the wasting of taxpayers' dollars. PVA submitted a statement for the record addressing areas where technology could help to reduce overpayments. To read PVA's statement, click [here](#). The hearing is available for viewing [here](#).

NEWS OF NOTE

PVA Hosts U.S. Access Board at National Office

On April 29, PVA hosted public and federal members of the U.S. Access Board, as well as Executive Director Sachin Dev Pavithran and staff. PVA CEO Carl Blake provided attendees with a tour to showcase the accessibility features of PVA's national office. Following the meeting, PVA leaders met with the Board to discuss PVA's architecture, sports and recreation, and advocacy priorities. More information about the Access Board's efforts are available [here](#).



PVA Presents at Abilities Expo in New York Metro

On May 2, PVA Chief Policy Officer Heather Ansley presented at the Abilities Expo in suburban New York City on improving access to air travel for people with disabilities. Ansley and Michele Erwin, President and Founder of All Wheels Up, spoke at a workshop titled, “Accessible Air Travel: Know Your Rights and Tips & Tricks!” Ansley focused on efforts in recent years at the national level to make improvements, including passage of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 and the Department of Transportation’s final rule on improving the safety and dignity of wheelchair users in air travel. The workshop provided a great opportunity to educate members of the broader disability community about their rights in air travel and PVA’s leadership of those efforts.

VA Announces Major Survivor Benefits Reforms

The VA has announced major changes in policy concerning survivors and dependents of deceased veterans. Starting this month, the VA will move the Office of Survivors Assistance from the Veterans Benefits Administration to the Office of the VA Secretary. In addition, the VA will create a team to guide and assist eligible survivors through the Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) process. Finally, the VA will begin working to identify ways to automate and simplify the DIC claims process.

Bipartisan and Bicameral ABC Act Reintroduced

Earlier this year, the bipartisan, bicameral [Alleviating Barriers to Caregivers \(ABC\) Act](#) was [reintroduced](#) by Representatives Kat Cammack (R-FL) and Seth Magaziner (D-RI), and Senators Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), and Ed Markey (D-MA). Under the ABC Act, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Social Security Administration, and Children's Health Insurance Program would be required to review their eligibility, processes, procedures, forms, and communications and seek ways to simplify them to reduce the administrative burden on family caregivers. The legislation would then also require the agencies to submit reports on findings and strategies for improvement to Congress within two years of enactment. The agencies would need to seek

input from family caregivers in their review and reporting. PVA supports the ABC Act and the elimination of red tape for family caregivers who interact with Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security.

Frank Bisignano Sworn-in as 18th SSA Commissioner

On May 7, the Social Security Administration (SSA) announced the swearing in of Frank Bisignano as the 18th Commissioner of Social Security. Previously, Bisignano served as the chairman and chief executive officer of Fiserv, a payments and financial technology company. Commissioner Bisignano has stated he plans to put beneficiaries first by bringing the Social Security’s error rate down, eliminating overpayment issues, reducing the chronically long wait times Americans face when seeking help from the agency, and investigating why it takes so much time to process disability applications.

SURVEY & COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

Southwest ADA Center Survey on the ADA

Did you know that this July 26 marks the 35th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990—a landmark civil rights law that continues to shape access and equity in everyday life? While progress has been made, the need to understand the ADA's ongoing impact—and the barriers that still exist— is more urgent than ever.

The Southwest ADA Center has created an anonymous survey to assess how far we’ve come and how far we still need to go. The survey results will be used to inform and guide technical assistance and policy recommendations related to the ADA. The survey closes on May 31, 2025. Click [here](#) to participate.

Veterans’ Committee Activities

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

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Great Plains PVA Members Support Walk MS: Nebraska

Great Plains PVA was proud to become a sponsor of the Walk MS: Nebraska, a fundraising event to raise awareness and money for MS research. In keeping with our mission and this year's goal to find new ways to support our members with MS, we were excited to join this event not only as a sponsor, but also with a team. On April 26th, the Great Plains PVA team came out in full force to join the Walk, show support for our members with MS, and provide information on PVA membership to others who may qualify. Our booth was set up in The Dog Zone providing us the opportunity to connect with members of our community living with MS, as well as a lot of their furry friends! Our Great Plains PVA team had over 20 members and was in the Top 10 fundraisers for this year's event. Thanks to Ladies Auxiliary Secretary Peggy Moore for making patriotic bandanas to give away to people with dogs who stopped by our booth.

Special "Thanks" to Shayna Goerdts, our chapter's MS Point of Contact, for leading this effort! We look forward to continuing our support for our members with MS through various opportunities throughout the year.







Nebraska Disability Pride Celebration

Saturday July 26th, 2025
9:00AM-1:00PM

**Antelope Park
Auld Pavilion
1560 Memorial Dr
Lincoln, NE**

Join the Fun

Free Snow Cones
Art show
Bounce house
Face painting
Magician
Air brush tattoos
Food Trucks
Raffle prizes
And More!



Look for updates on the celebration on our facebook page at
facebook.com/NebraskaDisabilityPride



Picture Description: A Diverse group of 10 people with and without visible disabilities waving

RESCUE & REUSE

EVENT DETAILS:

Lincoln Drop-off Dates

- **Dates:** Monday-Thursday, July 22-25 from 9 a.m.-5 pm and Friday, July 26 from 9 a.m.-noon
- **Location:** The Assistive Technology Partnership, 2301 NW 12th Street, Lincoln, NE

Lincoln Reuse Event

- **Dates:** Saturday, July 27, 2024 (Disability Pride Event)
- **Times:** 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
- **Location:** Antelope Park - Auld Pavilion, 1560 Memorial Dr., Lincoln, NE

☎ 402.436.2384

✉ amajerus@nrcne.org

🌐 <https://nrcne.org/rescueandreuse/>



FUNDED BY:

Omaha Power Soccer Club Finishes Spring Session



The spring session of our Omaha Power Soccer Club (OPSC) finished strong, with players showing incredible improvement in their skill sets. Half of the team now has their own Strike Force power soccer chair designed specially for power soccer play. Our coaches continue to come up with new and exciting ways to teach the players new skills and help them improve maneuverability and control. The players' Fan Club continued to show up in full force throughout this session to cheer on the players and show their support for this unique program.



CHAPTER BIRTHDAYS

May

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

June

Joshua Ourada * Jessica Nutz * John Weinburgh * Gary Miles * Dennis Wagner * Dean Nelson *
Richard Nobles * Daniel Griffin * William Stice * James Beversdorf * Versie Anding *
William Churchman * John McPhatter

July

Christina Caines * Paul VanCleave * Tammy Squier * David Nelson, Jr. * Richard Avena * Richard
Conley * Thomas Timmerman * Garold Chalupa * John Owens * Harold Bartlett * Richard "Dick"
Mondragon * Frank Kampovitz

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



**PVA Billiards Series
2nd Annual Great Plains PVA
9-Ball Tournament**

**September 19-20, 2025
Big John's Billiards
9819 M St. Omaha, NE**



**Friday
September 19th**

**9:30 Registration
10:00 Players Meeting
10:30 Play starts
12:30 Lunch provided
1:30 Play continues
Skills Competition
50/50 & Silent Auction**

**Saturday
September 20th**

**10:00 Play Starts
12:30 PVA Billiards Series Yr-End
Awards Luncheon provided
1:30 Play continues
50/50 & Silent Auction**



\$10,700 Prize Fund

	Wheelchair Division (Based on 16 players)*	MS Division (Based on 16 players)*
Main Flight:		
1st	\$850 + Cue & Plaque	\$850 + Cue & Plaque
2nd	700 + Plaque	700 + Plaque
3rd	600 + Plaque	600 + Plaque
4th	500	500
5th	400	400
6th	400	400
Second Flight:		
1st	\$400 + Cue & Plaque	\$400 + Cue & Plaque
2nd	350 + Plaque	350 + Plaque
3rd	300 + Plaque	300 + Plaque
4th	200	200
5th	150	150
6th	150	150
7th	100	100
8th	100	100
9th	75	75
10th	75	75

* Prize fund is adjusted down with fewer players.

Progressive Play:

Race to 5 in Preliminary Rounds
Race to 7 in Semi-Finals
Race to 9 in Finals

**Plus: Skills Competition
Daily Lunches
Goody Bags
Free Drawings**

**\$75 ENTRY FEE
ONLINE REGISTRATION
OPENS IN JULY**

**WATCH FOR MORE
INFORMATION**

For questions contact:
bushman@greatplainspva.org



Great Plains Chapter

PVA Billiards Series 2nd Annual Great Plains PVA 9-Ball Tournament



September 19 & 20, 2025
Big John's Billiards, Omaha

SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES



Table Sponsor - \$250



- sponsor logo on table sign
- sponsor name in program

Skills Contest Sponsor - \$400



- sponsor logo on table sign
- sponsor name in program

Meal Sponsor - \$500



- sponsor logo on meal tables
- sponsor name in program

Goody Bag Sponsor



Provide 25 items with your company name/logo to be included in player goody bags.

Auction Contributing Sponsor



Provide an item or basket to be included in our silent auction.

Please check your preferred sponsorship option at the left and complete this form:

Sponsor Name

Sponsor Address

City/State/Zip

Contact Name

Contact Email

Contact Phone #

Please mail this form and your check to:

Great Plains PVA

Attn: Billiards

7612 Maple Street

Omaha, NE 68134

or

email this form to bushman@greatplainspva.org
and use the QR code below to pay online.

Scan the QR code
to donate online:



Proceeds support our Adapted Sports & Recreation Program.

QUESTIONS? CONTACT MARY AT BUSHMAN@GREATPLAINSPVA.ORG



Paralyzed Veterans of America

Great Plains Chapter



Follow us on Social Media!

@greatplainspva



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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.