



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.



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.