



Washington Update

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

SHUTDOWN UPDATE

The federal government shutdown is closing in on record territory as October ends with no resolution in sight. By comparison, the longest shutdown, which occurred between 2018 to 2019, lasted 35 days. Multiple attempts to pass a temporary funding resolution have fallen flat in the Senate, while the House remains in a protracted recess. Although there have been rumors of negotiations and compromises, nothing serious has materialized so far. Several bills seeking to ease the adverse impact of the government closure on various groups have been introduced, but none of these bills have passed, including one that would ensure military servicemembers are paid regardless of the government's operating status.

Lawmakers acknowledge that the shutdown will extend into November, and some are even talking about potential stopgap legislation to keep the government funded through the remainder of this year or early next. We will monitor and report on these proposals as information becomes available. As a reminder, while the shutdown does interfere with some functions of the VA, it does not affect PVA's work directly. If you need assistance or support, please reach out to your local PVA NSO, or call the PVA benefits hotline at 1-866-734-0857.

SVAC HEARING LOOKS AT VA DISABILITY COMPENSATION BENEFITS

On October 30, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC) held a hearing focused on examining the veterans' disability compensation process at the VA. PVA joined advocates from other veterans service organizations in pushing back on recent reporting from the Washington Post that claimed VA's disability compensation is "too generous."

SVAC Chairman Jerry Moran (R-KS) opened the hearing with a reference to the Washington Post articles. He stated that, "I have heard from numerous veterans and groups who are frustrated that these articles have left an impression that veterans are engaging in widespread fraud in the disability claims space. The cases of fraud highlighted in these articles do not reflect the reality of who veterans are, the vast majority of the veteran population, or the values veterans embody."

Jeremy Villanueva, Associate Legislative Director, testified before the committee on behalf of PVA. In his oral statement, Mr. Villanueva said, "It's disgraceful when disabled veterans are portrayed as fraudsters and cheats simply for accessing earned benefits. He further stated that, "It is a disservice to the sacrifices of the many men and women who have served this nation to suggest that large sums of money are being wasted

simply because veterans receive earned benefits for service-connected conditions.”

Mr. Villanueva further noted that PVA has gone on record numerous times to discuss ways to make the disability compensation system less vulnerable to fraud and waste, while ensuring that veterans are fairly compensated for their conditions. His statement focused on two of those ways: ensuring proper compensation and pension exams and reviewing Disability Benefits Questionnaires for quality assurance.

The belief that the system is not plagued by fraud but could be improved was shared by the VA Inspector General and a representative from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) as well. VA’s Inspector General, Cheryl Mason, said it was “reprehensible for any person or entity to suggest that many veterans are hustling or scamming to get benefits.” She told committee members that if staff with the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) discover, while doing audit or inspection work, evidence of fraud, they immediately share with OIG investigators. Conversely, when OIG investigators identify weaknesses in the system through their investigations, they provide that information to the audit staff for further review.

Elizabeth Curda, GAO’s Director, Education, Workforce and Income Security testified that, “VA has made some progress in addressing these high-risk issues, such as identifying deficiency root causes and establishing action plans to address them.” She further stated that more work is needed to address the concerns. For example, she pointed out that GAO’s [2024](#) and [2025](#) reports identified opportunities to strengthen VA’s oversight of the quality of exams provided by contracted medical providers (examiners). For example, GAO found incorrect financial incentive payments to contractors. To address this and other shortfalls, GAO made five recommendations. All five remain open as of October 2025. VA has partially addressed one and described plans to address the others.

Offering a uniquely differing view, was Army Lt. Colonel (Ret.), Daniel Gade, PhD. He feels the VA disability apparatus has strayed from its purpose and lost sight of its mission. He told the committee that VA should focus

more on supporting the transitioning service members and less on compensation. He identified the three principles he believes the committee should pursue to fix the disability compensation system. First, the goal of any system of veterans benefits and care should be to return veterans as closely as possible to the life situations they would have found themselves in but for their service. Second, the system should incentivize desired outcomes by linking treatment for an illness with the compensation associated with it. In short, if you don’t get treatment for your condition, you have no right to expect the taxpayer to fund its effects. Third, the system needs total reform in nature and types of disabilities compensated. Those injuries not directly caused by military service might be good targets for treatment rather than compensation.

The potential outcomes of this hearing could reverberate for quite some time. To watch the recording of the hearing and read through each of the statements, click [here](#).

VA SECRETARY URGES POOR-PERFORMING MEDICAL CENTERS TO “DO BETTER”

In August, VA reported that many of its hospitals received high marks as part of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) 2025 hospital quality ratings. 77 percent of VA hospitals that received an Overall Hospital Quality Star Rating received 4 or 5 stars, and no VA hospitals received a one-star rating. Over 90 percent of the hospitals with ratings maintained or improved them compared to the previous year.

Less than a dozen saw their ratings slip and 26 facilities received two-star or three-star ratings, so there is room for improvement. Commenting on the ratings in August, VA Secretary Collins said, “Our job is to continue raising the bar for customer service and convenience throughout the department, so VA works better for the veterans, families, caregivers and survivors we are charged with serving.” Recently, he gathered the leadership of VA’s struggling facilities together and urged them to do better without additional resources or personnel.



“It's a matter of leadership,” Collins told POLITICO, a Hill-based newspaper that covers policy and politics. “The answer for VA has always been just give us more money, give us more people to solve problems. And when you're dealing with some quality issues, and how you handle patient care, a lot of that is just simply whether you have the right processes in place.” Although the Secretary didn't set a specific timeframe for improvement, it is clear he expects results. He is optimistic that many of the poorest performing sites could improve their ratings in just a year or two.

SVAC RANKING MEMBER CALLS FOR GAO AUDIT OF WORKFORCE DIRECTIVES ON VA SCI/D CARE

On October 23, Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC) Ranking Member Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) released a [letter](#) he sent to the Government Accountability Office (GAO) requesting an audit of the effect VA staffing policies are having on the spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D) system of care. The Ranking Member sent the letter following testimony PVA National President Robert Thomas provided before the committee during a mid-September hearing on the SCI/D system of care. In addition to raising staffing concerns, the letter requests a review of VA's implementation of certain parts of the Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act (Public Law 118-210). We will monitor the status of this request.

NEWS OF NOTE

White House Announces Lower Costs for IVF Medications

The White House recently announced a third-party agreement with leading pharmaceutical companies that supply fertility medications. It is too early to tell how the agreement will impact individuals. More about the announcement is available [here](#).

Key Nomination Advances

Air Force Reserve Major General John Bartrum's

nomination to be VA Under Secretary for Health cleared another hurdle recently when the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee voted to advance his nomination to the full chamber. On October 22, committee members agreed to favorably report his nomination in voting that occurred along party lines. Bartrum currently serves in the most senior medical officer position in the Air Force Reserve and is the most senior Medical Service Corps hospital executive in the Air Force across all components. If confirmed, he would be responsible for overseeing the Veterans Health Administration, which is the largest integrated health system in the nation. This role involves managing a vast network of health care services for approximately nine million enrolled veterans across various facilities, including medical centers, clinics, and nursing homes.

2026 COLA Announced for Social Security Benefits

On October 24, the Social Security Administration announced that Social Security beneficiaries will receive a 2.8 percent cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) starting in 2026. The increase is reflective of the effects of inflation. Military and federal employment retirement benefits will be raised by the same amount, but Congress has yet to approve the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment of 2025 (COLA) Act (S. 2392/H.R. 2138). Once they do, VA's disability compensation programs would receive the same COLA.

PVA Joins Virtual Roundtable with CFPB

Recently, PVA joined other veterans and military service organizations in a virtual roundtable with the [Consumer Financial Protection Bureau \(CFPB\) Office of Servicemember Affairs \(OSA\)](#). The OSA is the office tasked with helping servicemembers, veterans, and military families navigate the unique financial challenges of service by providing financial resources, monitoring complaints, and holding companies accountable. Topics discussed by various organizations included continued implementation of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, ensuring enforcement of the Military Lending Act, and continued monitoring of VA claims shark businesses.

PVA took the opportunity to encourage the OSA to provide strong oversight of student loan servicers;

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increase its partnership with the Department of Education, particularly around total and permanent disability (TPD) loan discharges; and address issues related to income driven repayment (IDR) plans and the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program.

SURVEYS & COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

NEW: Survey for Project Focused on Improving the Airport Journey of Wheelchair Users

InterVISTAS is currently collaborating with Indiana University – Bloomington (IUB) to collect information on the air travel experiences of people with disabilities. Funded by the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, this project strives to identify ways to enhance the air travel experiences of individuals using wheelchairs. PVA is a member of the panel overseeing this project.

How to Participate:

1. **Register:** Please first [complete the screening survey](#). This will only take 5 minutes.
2. **Survey:** Once registered, eligible participants (those aged 18 or older, living with a disability that requires the use of a wheelchair, and currently residing in the U.S.) will receive a link to the full online survey.

Your Privacy Matters: Participation in the survey is entirely voluntary. All information you provide will be kept strictly confidential.

Have Questions? Please contact the research team at:

- Email: travelX@iu.edu
- Phone: 812-855-9037

The survey will close once researchers have reached the target number of completed responses.

REMINDER: NPR Survey on Hotel Accessibility

With support from PVA, NPR is surveying wheelchair users to hear about your experiences with hotels or lodging when you travel. Sharing your story will help

them report the facts about these issues. NPR will not share or publish any identifying information without your permission.

[Take the survey.](#)

REMINDER: Survey on Addressing Gaps in Measuring Disability in Transportation System Data

The University of Illinois at Chicago invites you to participate in a study for a research project about travel surveys and questions asked to people with disabilities. The findings from the survey will be used to develop a guidebook that will support transit professionals in better understanding travel barriers faced by people with disabilities. Your participation includes [filling out an initial screener](#) that will check for potential participants' eligibility for this study. After the screener, if you are eligible to participate in the study, you will receive a link to a survey that will ask you questions about some demographics, your travel experiences, and your opinions on how transportation professionals measure disability. If you have any questions about participating in this project, please contact: Kevin Hans Waitkuweit at kwaitk2@uic.edu.

Veterans' Committee Activities

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