



Washington Update

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

GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN LINGERS WITH NO CLEAR RESOLUTION IN SIGHT

The government shutdown is nearing the end of its third week and there is no clear resolution in sight. Thankfully, much of the VA is shielded from the adverse effects of a government closure by advanced appropriations, which PVA and its veterans service organization (VSO) partners previously helped secure. Direct care through the Veterans Health Administration continues and VA benefits, including compensation and education, are still being processed and delivered. Veterans Benefits Administration regional offices have closed and while National Cemetery Administration burials continue uninterrupted, the maintenance of cemetery grounds and the placement of permanent headstones at grave sites have ceased for the time being.

The Department of Defense is affected by the shutdown, but immediate fears that active-duty servicemembers would have to serve without pay were alleviated when the president directed the department to use “all available funds” to ensure they received their October 15 paychecks. Beyond that, the availability of their paychecks is less certain. Also, important things like permanent change of station moves, and family support programs have been limited or will not be available during the lapse in funding.

On October 14, PVA joined more than a dozen military organizations and VSOs to urge Congress to ensure servicemembers are paid, and more importantly, to work across party lines to pass a bipartisan, bicameral solution that protects servicemembers, military families, veterans, and survivors.

A Republican measure to keep the government funded until November 21 passed the House by a narrow majority of 217 to 212 on September 19. The Senate, whose current rules require 60 affirmative votes for passage, have failed to advance the measure on several occasions. The prospects of a breakthrough grow increasingly slim, and lawmakers appear to be bracing for a lengthy government shutdown.

While the government shutdown may affect aspects of your daily life and 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 National Service Officer, or call the PVA benefits hotline at 1-866-734-0857.

USB NOMINEE WITHDRAWS FROM CONSIDERATION

Recently, the president’s nominee to serve as the VA’s Under Secretary for Benefits (USB) withdrew her name from consideration. Karen Brazell, who is currently serving as a senior adviser to VA Secretary Doug Collins,



was nominated by President Trump to lead the Veterans Benefits Administration back in June and appeared before the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee in early September for her confirmation hearing. Ms. Brazell indicated she was withdrawing for personal reasons. It's unclear how quickly a new nominee will be named. By law, department officials are required to establish a commission to consider candidates for the leadership post, a process that took about two months when it was initiated earlier this year.

SENATE VOTES ON THE MAJOR RICHARD STAR ACT

On October 8, two attempts from Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Ranking Member Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) to advance stalled bipartisan legislation to deliver more than 50,000 combat-injured veterans their full military benefits and financial certainty failed to pass. The Major Richard Star Act would ensure these veterans could receive their full Department of Defense retirement and VA disability payments, which currently has a dollar-for-dollar offset.

Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Roger Wicker (R-MS) blocked Senator Blumenthal's motion to pass the legislation due to the cost of the bill and the lack of a means to pay for the estimated \$10 billion price tag. With his attempt to pass the bill unanimously blocked, Senator Blumenthal then offered a compromise motion that would have set up a single roll call vote on the bill at a 60-vote threshold. The motion would have waived all procedural votes to protect floor time and given Republican Majority Leader John Thune (R-SD) discretion to call up the vote at any point before the end of the year. Chairman Wicker also blocked this motion. The bill still can be brought to a vote in the House or the Senate, however, there is no indication that this will happen anytime soon.

DOT ISSUES NOTICE OF ENFORCEMENT DISCRETION FOR RULE PROTECTING WHEELCHAIR AND SCOOTER USERS IN AIR TRAVEL

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) issued a notice of enforcement discretion stating that the

department is delaying enforcement of certain provisions of the final rule, "Ensuring Safe Accommodations for Air Travelers with Disabilities Using Wheelchairs." The rule, published in December 2024, expanded the rights of passengers who fly with wheelchairs and scooters. According to the notice, DOT will be delaying enforcement of four sections of the rule until December 2026. The four provisions include: (1) an airline's liability for mishandled wheelchairs; (2) the frequency of refresher trainings for airline personnel and contractors; (3) passenger pre-departure notification requirements; and (4) reimbursements of fare differences when the passenger's preferred flights cannot accommodate their wheelchair or scooter. The other provisions of the rule are still enforceable. In addition, DOT announced its intent to revise the requirements under these four provisions with a potential upcoming notice of proposed rulemaking late next summer.

Airlines continue to have an obligation to repair or replace mishandled wheelchairs or scooters. If you are a wheelchair or scooter user and experience issues while flying, especially an airline damaging your mobility device or difficulties with aisle chair transfers, please contact Danica Gonzalves, PVA Senior Advocacy Attorney, at DanicaG@PVA.org.

GAO REPORT ON THE ACCESSIBILITY OF MEDICAL FOSTER HOMES FOR VETERANS

According to a recent Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, VA projects that demand for home-based care, including home-based long-term care, will increase 51 percent from fiscal year 2020 to 2038. One way that VA is increasing availability of home-based long-term care services is through the Medical Foster Home Program. In a medical foster home, a caregiver provides supervision and assistance in the caregivers' home to eligible veterans in need of nursing home care. VA has been expanding this program since December 2021 with the goal of having at least one medical foster home aligned with each of VA's 170 medical centers by 2026. As of May 2025, over 700 veterans were participating in the program.



Provisions in the Joseph Maxwell Cleland and Robert Joseph Dole Memorial Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2022, which passed as part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2022 (P.L. 117-164), gave VA the authority to pay for eligible veterans' costs for care in private medical foster homes for a five-year period. It also required VA to create a system for the ongoing monitoring of the program, including tracking the number of veterans requesting care.

GAO determined that while VA has made progress in implementing the data tracking requirement, as of May 2025, they had not begun paying for veterans' medical foster home costs. VA says the problem stems from outdated systems that still need updating, but they are exploring ways to begin paying for medical foster home costs for certain veterans before their authority related to the Cleland-Dole Act expires in 2027. VA also believes the tracking system may help address caregiver recruitment and retention challenges by providing more information on why caregivers are denied or leave the program. The new system may also give them a better understanding of the amount of work required to recruit homes into the program. You can read the report in its entirety [here](#).

NEWS OF NOTE

PVA Cohosts Access to the Skies Summit

On September 26, PVA cohosted the Access to the Skies Summit with All Wheels Up. The summit was a half-day hybrid event to update members of the veterans and disability communities on efforts underway to make air travel more accessible both today and in the future. The event featured airline leaders, researchers, and advocates working to improve air travel accessibility. Chief Executive Officer Carl Blake opened and closed the event with All Wheels Up Founder and President Michele Erwin. Chief Policy Officer Heather Ansley presented to attendees about what's happening in Washington, DC to improve access to the skies. Other panels discussed what advocates are working on to improve accessibility and what people with disabilities should know now to make air travel easier. The Access to the Skies Summit took place following the All Wheels

Up Global Forum on September 24-25 on the Microsoft Campus in Redmond, WA. Chief Policy Officer Ansley also presented a policy update at the Global Forum.

Senate Confirms Several DOL Appointees

Several senior level appointments at the Department of Labor (DOL) have been confirmed as part of a larger group of more than 100 officials that the Senate pushed through using its "nuclear option" to expedite consideration. The appointees were voted in along a party-line vote of 51-47.

Included in the group are the new DOL solicitor, the head of the Wage and Hour Division, who oversees child labor violations, the head of the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), and the Chief Financial Officer. We are still waiting for a Senate floor vote to confirm the Assistant Secretary for the Veterans' Employment and Training Service. The Senate also confirmed an addition to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which restores a quorum to the EEOC for the first time since January, meaning there's enough members on the EEOC to authorize decision making.

October Marks 80th NDEAM

October 2025 marks the 80th anniversary of National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). NDEAM began in 1945 to celebrate employees with physical disabilities and evolved into what it is today, an opportunity to celebrate all people with disabilities in the work force.

The Department of Labor has published resources tailored to employees and employers to help celebrate NDEAM that can help workplaces be more welcoming to disabled staff. There are educational resources, training modules for supervisors, posters, suggested social media posts, and other materials to help increase awareness of NDEAM. There are also materials focused on educators and youth services professionals, state level resources, tools for associations and unions, and for federal agencies.

You can see the NDEAM resources page [here](#).

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New OIG Report Questions the Accuracy of VR&E Claims

In late September, the VA's Office of Inspector General (OIG) released a new report titled, "[The Accuracy of Veteran Readiness and Employment Claims Cannot Be Assessed Because of Insufficient Documentation.](#)"

The OIG conducted an audit and reviewed claims submitted from April to September of 2023 to determine whether staff processed eligibility and entitlement accurately. The OIG found that despite training and procedures around the regulatory requirements related to eligibility and entitlement, many Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) counselors lacked appropriate documentation to support their decisions.

The OIG recommended that the VR&E program coordinate with the Office of General Counsel on a comprehensive review of the program to ensure it is conforming to all legal requirements set out by Congress. OIG also recommended VR&E develop clear processes that monitor eligibility decisions to improve accuracy, along with improved standardization of tracking related to eligibility decisions, extensions, and denials.

WEBINARS, SURVEYS, & COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

PVA ABA Webinar Series Postponed Due to Shutdown

The webinar series with the U.S. Access Board originally scheduled for October, November, and December on accessibility requirements under the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) has been postponed due to the government shutdown. We will let you know when the series is rescheduled.

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.](#)

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.

REMINDER: Air Travel Survey Opportunity

The research teams at Shirley Ryan AbilityLab, Northwestern University, and Indiana University are conducting a research study to explore the air travel experiences of people with mobility disabilities. They want to understand the air travel challenges and things that make air travel participation better to improve airlines and airports.

In this study you may be asked to attend one focus group in person or online. If you would like more information about this opportunity, please contact them for screening using this link: [Share Your Experience Flying with a Physical Disability](#).

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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