



# Washington Update

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

## **BILL TO INCREASE SMC AND DIC INTRODUCED IN THE HOUSE**

On November 17, Rep. Tom Barrett (R-MI) introduced [H.R. 6047, the Sharri Briley and Eric Edmundson Veterans Benefits Expansion Act](#), which would increase the amount of Special Monthly Compensation (SMC) for the most severely disabled veterans. It would also raise VA Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) rates for the surviving family members of deceased servicemembers and veterans. For years, PVA has advocated for increasing these benefits for veterans with the most significant service-connected disabilities and their survivors.

SMC is arguably the most important ancillary benefit for veterans with severe, service-connected disabilities. The benefit is unique in that it is dependent on non-economic factors such as the profoundness of the disability, personal inconvenience, and social inadaptability. For example, a veteran who lost the use of their lower extremities in service to their country is compensated not just for the loss in their future earnings potential, but also all future hardships and costs associated with the disability.

DIC is intended to protect against survivor impoverishment after the death of a service-disabled veteran. In 2025, this compensation starts at \$1,653.07 per month and increases if the surviving spouse has eligible children who are under age 18. The DIC program

was established in 1993 and has been minimally adjusted since then. DIC payments were intended to provide veterans' survivors with the means to maintain some semblance of economic stability after the loss of their loved one.

[The Sharri Briley and Eric Edmundson Veterans Benefits Expansion Act](#) would increase the rates of SMC R1, R2, and T, which are reserved for the most seriously disabled veterans, and increase the DIC amount by one percent every year for five years in addition to the yearly cost-of-living adjustment. This would be the most significant increase in survivors' benefits and SMC in years, and a major step toward addressing the needs of our nation's seriously disabled veterans and their survivors.

On December 3 at 10:15 am ET, PVA National Treasurer Tom Wheaton will testify before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee in a legislative hearing that includes this bill. The hearing will be [broadcast live](#). Also, please [visit PVAAction Force](#) to send a message of support for this bill to your Representative.

## **HOUSE HOLDS OVERSIGHT HEARING FOCUSED ON VA'S MDEO**

On November 20, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs held an oversight hearing titled,



“Improving Outcomes for Disabled Veterans: Oversight of VA’s Medical Disability Examination Office (MDEO).” The hearing was a single panel comprised of the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the VA’s Executive Director of MDEO. PVA submitted a statement for the record.

The Veterans Benefits Administration houses MDEO, which is tasked with overseeing contract examiners who provide compensation and pension (C&P) examinations. In 2024, GAO made several recommendations to improve the oversight mechanism within MDEO. PVA highlighted that report in a previous hearing focused on C&P exams that had accessibility barriers at facilities leased by contractors providing examinations. An additional report was released earlier this year focused on oversight, quality control issues, preventing errors during exams, and correcting errors while improving accountability.

Over the past few years, GAO has reported breakdowns in procedures for correcting frequent or complex issues with contracted exams, incorrect financial incentive payments made to contractors, and gaps in feedback from examiners; all of which was highlighted in GAO’s written testimony to the committee.

Subcommittee members pressed VA and GAO representatives for answers to what were seemingly simple questions, such as overall spending on contracts for C&P exams, error rates, improvements that MDEO plans to implement, and how MDEO plans to improve their oversight obligation. However, VA provided very few answers to the subcommittee, often stating they would have to take a question for the record and follow up later. Subcommittee Chairman Morgan Luttrell (R-TX) closed the hearing out by informing VA that they would be invited back soon and expressing his hope that they would have more appropriate answers at the next hearing.

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

## PVA PARTICIPATES IN HOUSE QUARTERLY MEETING

PVA recently joined other veterans service organizations (VSOs) in a meeting with Rep. Mike Levin (D-CA). Last Congress, Rep. Levin was the ranking member on the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee (HVAC), Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity (EO), but he moved to the House Committee on Appropriations where he is a member of the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Subcommittee.

While he was a member of HVAC, Rep. Levin set himself apart from other members by holding quarterly check-in meetings with VSOs who worked EO issues. Although he is no longer a member of HVAC, he continues to hold meetings with VSOs to get a sense of what the veteran community needs from his new assignment.

PVA stressed the need for increased infrastructure funding across the VA, especially for projects related to care for veterans with spinal cord injuries and disorders. There was also discussion related to recent articles in The Washington Post, which have led to a Senate hearing and several roundtables in the House. PVA staff stressed the importance of maintaining the current veterans’ benefits system and safeguarding hard won benefits. He agreed that VA should continue to engage in robust oversight and offered his office as a resource.

## NEWS OF NOTE

### DOJ Opens Investigation into Florida Theme Parks for Banning Rollator Walkers

The U.S. Department of Justice [announced](#) at the end of November that they opened an [investigation](#) into United Parks & Resorts Inc. after receiving complaints that three theme parks banned rollator walkers. The DOJ investigation will determine whether the three parks, including SeaWorld Orlando, Busch Gardens Tampa Bay, and Aquatica Orlando, violated Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA requires public accommodations to permit individuals with mobility disabilities to use wheelchairs and manually powered mobility aids in any areas open to public use. Complaints filed alleged that the parks prohibited rollator walkers



with seats. Furthermore, the complaints allege that the parks offer guests the option to rent alternative mobility aids for a surcharge. The DOJ investigation seeks to determine whether the parks engaged in disability discrimination in violation of the ADA.

### VA Officials Warn of New Scam Targeting Veterans

VA recently sounded the alarm about a new scam targeting veterans, surviving spouses, and family members who receive VA benefits. The scammers pretend to be VA representatives collecting an overpayment of VA benefits. They are using official looking letters, emails, and texts that often include fake VA logos and letterhead, making it extremely difficult to distinguish from genuine VA communications. If you receive a letter or any communication about a VA benefits overpayment, log into your official [VA.gov account](https://va.gov) immediately to verify if you truly owe money.

If you find you do owe money, VA's Debt Management Center offers many [repayment options](#). Also, be aware that VA will not call you about potential overpayments unless you initiated the inquiry first. You can learn more about the scam and ways to protect yourself [here](#).

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](mailto:travelX@iu.edu)
- Phone: 812-855-9037

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

### Veterans' Committee Activities

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

## SURVEYS & COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

### REMINDER: 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

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