

Mountain States Chapter



CHAPTER INFORMATION

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FY 2023-24 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

OFFICERS

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Sonny de Guzman Andrew Lewis Scott Miller Dan Spotts Erin Cavit Richard Guerrero Izzy Abbass (National Director)

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ABOUT OUR NEWSLETTER:

The Mountain States News is published quarterly in the Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall. For those who have email, a PDF file is sent to them electronically. If you would like a hard copy, or to be added to our mailing list please contact the chapter office.

MISSION & KEY OBJECTIVES

Mountain States Chapter, founded in 1955, is a member of The Paralyzed Veterans of America, chartered by the United States Congress. It is a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving the needs of its members, all of whom have catastrophic paralysis caused by spinal cord injury and/or disease. Today, MSCPVA has members located throughout the Rocky Mountain region of Colorado, Montana, Utah, and Wyoming. Our regional headquarters is located in Aurora, Colorado.

- 1. To aid and assist in every way veterans of the Armed Forces of the United States who have suffered injuries or diseases of the spinal cord.
- 2. To publicize the needs of such veterans through every means and channel available in order to effectuate the fulfillment of such needs as best as possible.
- 3. To promote the full participation of the spinal cord injured or diseased into society
- 4. To advocate and foster thorough and continuing medical research in the fields connected with injuries and diseases of the spinal cord.
- 5. To advocate and foster a comprehensive and effective reconditioning program for its members, as well as all paraplegics, that includes a thorough physical reconditioning, sports and recreation program.
- 6. To cooperate with other corporations and groups engaged in similar activities with a view toward carrying out the purposes described herein above in the most effective manner.Through the assistance of dedicated supporters and volunteers, the members and staff of MSCPVA carries out our broad mission.

Disclaimer

The Mountain States Chapter is one of 33 member chapters of the Paralyzed Veterans of America, a congressionally charted veterans service non-profit organization. MSCPVA has been assisting veterans with spinal cord injuries or spinal cord diseases, including multiple sclerosis, since 1955.

The Mountain States News is published quarterly by MSCPVA. It is designed to inform our members and other interested parties on veterans issues, legislation, and other matters deemed to be relevant to the disabled community. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of Mountain States Chapter and no endorsement or approval of the advertisements enclosed should be implied.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT





Hi everyone,

I hope your Fall is off to a great start and you are doing well. I look forward to seeing you in the office for our annual Holiday Party in December!

In the meantime, I wanted to let you know that I am stepping down as the Chapter President and turning over the reins to our VP Eric Allen. I've enjoyed your support for the past almost three years and I'd like to think the Chapter is in a much better position than it was when I was asked to step in on an interim basis. I know a few of you may not want to see me

step down (probably a lot more of you wondering why I'm still around) but I do believe it's time.

I've been involved in Veteran issues for a couple of decades now and I've been part of a few organizations where leaders stay in positions for way too many years. As I've said on a few occasions, "The army no longer fights on horseback (sorry Dan Koehl), they transformed and adapted to new things. The same is true of our organization."

We need new ideas and new energy as we continue to evolve as an organization. Over the past few years, we've increased our membership by more than 10%, we've added to our income by starting a second bingo operation in Aurora which has allowed us to put more into investments rather than withdrawing funds, we've presented over \$40,000 in scholarships to clinicians at the SCI-D clinic, we've beefed up our leadership by finding regional reps throughout the chapter, we've started to rotate our board meetings to different states, throughout Covid we provided lunches to staff at the VA who take such great care of us as a thank you and most of all, we've started to revitalize our sports and recreational opportunities for our whole chapter. Are we done yet? Definitely not and we need to keep our momentum.

I'm not going anywhere soon, and I'll still be serving as National Director. I'll also continue to be the co-chair of our national MS Committee and I'll still be doing stuff at the chapter, though just not as your President. Eric Allen our VP is very capable and has been to a few National events as well as a key member of our finance committee, so he's not new to what's going on. I've known Eric for a long time (he was actually in my infantry squad) and I have no doubt that he will continue to lead our chapter in an effective way. Good luck Eric!

So, thank you all for your support and your enthusiasm for our Chapter. All my very Best,





Eric Allen is a Colorado Native, raised in the foothills outside of Denver. He is extremely proud of his heritage which includes more than 10,000 years of ancestry in the land that is now known as Colorado.

He is an Army and Desert Storm Veteran. Eric spent over 30 years in the Oil and Gas industry working for one of the largest companies in the United States. Starting with a shovel and pick in his hands and ending as a Regional Manager. Over the course of his career he worked in more than a dozen states from Maine to Utah.

His career was cut short in 2017 when Multiple Sclerosis exacerbations left him unable to perform his work. With time, Eric has found great happiness as a volunteer. Some of the organizations he has volunteered for include Grand Junction VA hospital. Easter Seals, Colorado Discover Ability, Park County Search and Rescue, Special Olympics, several ski teams, and the Paralyzed Veterans of America. He has served on the board of the Paralyzed Veterans of America for the last three years.

During his time with the PVA he has held the position of Secretary, Vice President and now the President. Eric's hobbies include skiing, fishing, boating, hunting ,shotgun sports and most importantly spending time with his family. He and his family live in the mountains west of Denver.

The Mountain States Chapter of the PVA has helped him through the darkest 7 years of his life and now that his illnesses have stabilized he looks forward to giving back to the organization.

Eric Allen

FROM THE NATIONAL SERVICE OFFICE





The VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) and FBI seek your help to stop medical identity theft scams.

Medical identity theft occurs when someone steals or uses your personal information to receive medical care

or submits fraudulent claims for payment to health insurers without your authorization. Medical identity theft can be committed by anyone, including family members, caregivers, healthcare providers or pharmacy staff, telemarketers, and fraudsters.

If you or a family member has experienced any of the following, you may be a victim of medical identity theft:

Received VA benefits or healthcare insurance correspondence you did not request or initiate (such as appointment reminders or benefit determination letters)

Were sent bills, explanations of benefits, or other paperwork for services not received Solicited for or received prescription drugs, durable medical equipment, or medical supplies that you did not order or authorize

Discovered incorrect information within your medical records

Denied insurances (life, long-term care, or supplemental) due to inaccurate medical history

Contacted about or informed of action to collect on unknown outstanding medical expenses in your name

Noticed missing mail or unauthorized access to your financial records

How to Protect Yourself

Secure all your personal and health insurance information. Do not allow others to use your health insurance (an illegal act) and be cautious with whom you share your data.

Beware of unsolicited "free" healthcare service offers or promised compensation.

Check your explanations of benefits carefully to ensure the accuracy of dates, locations, providers, and services billed.

Notify VA and your insurers if your identity or that of a covered family member is compromised.

Alert your local VA if your VA ID cards are lost or stolen.

Monitor your credit reports for new inquiries, opened credit lines, or unknown debts.

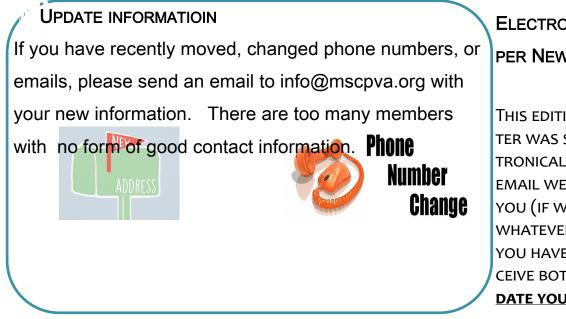
Submit complaints of suspected medical identity theft to the VA OIG or FBI

VA OIG

Online:va.gov/oig/hotline Phone: (800) 488-8244 | Fax: (202) 495-5861 Mail: VA Inspector General Hotline (53H) 810 Vermont Avenue, NW Washington, DC 20420 FBI Online: tips.fbi.gov

Via your local field office: fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices





ELECTRONIC AND / OR PA-PER NEWSLETTER.

THIS EDITION OF THE NEWSLET-TER WAS SENT OUT BOTH ELEC-TRONICALLY TO WHATEVER EMAIL WE HAVE ON FILE FOR YOU (IF WE HAVE ONE) AND TO WHATEVER MAILING ADDRESS YOU HAVE. IF YOU DID NOT RE-CEIVE BOTH.... <u>CALL US TO UP-</u> DATE YOUR

INFO. IF YOU ONLY WANT

ONE STYLE ... LET US KNOW

Volunteer Corner BY Karan Miller



Our volunteers will be on hand to assist and support the (MSCPVA) Annual Walk and Roll September 23, 2023 at Prospect Lake at Memorial Park. It will be held at the West end of the lake at the boat house. It will run from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm. Our volunteers will be meeting and greeting our veterans and the community.

The volunteers will be meeting October 30, 2023 to assemble raffle baskets for the Bowl-a-thon. We will be meeting at Loretta Spotts. We will have a brief meeting, lunch and then assemble the baskets.

Put it on your calendar-November 11th at King Pin Lanes-2023 Margaret Samsel Strike Up Awareness Bowl-a-thon. Volunteers, we need every one of you! Come make this a success!

The Auxiliary November/Christmas Party meeting will be on November 20th at the Coca Cola bldg. 1935 Cygnet Heights, Colorado Springs, CO 80916. The starting time is 11:00 and lunch will be provided.

Reminder, all MSCPVA Auxiliary volunteers and significant others are invited to the MSCPVA Annual Christmas party November 16th. The time and location is to be announced.

Volunteers! Thank you for all you do! You are our valuable foundation!



The

Margaret Samsel Memorial Strike Up Awareness

No-Tap Bowl-a-thon

November 11, 2023 at 2:00 pm. Check in 1:30 King Pin Lanes

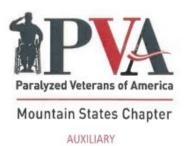
3410 Academy Blvd N Colorado Springs, CO 80917





Under 18 \$15

Charity Event Hosted by MSCPVA Auxiliary Benefiting Paralyzed Veterans of America – Mountain States Chapter For more information contact 719-510-7737 or 303-597-0038 MSCPVA is an IRS 501c3 non-profit organization. Fed Tax ID #84-6036190, CO Tax ID #98-05431



GREAT PRIZES and GREAT FUN

MSCPVA Auxiliary Volunteer of the Year

This extraordinary woman was born a farmer's daughter in Hetttinger, ND in 1946, graduated from High School in 1964 and continued to college. The following years included marriage, two children, a move to Denver, Colorado and a thirty-seven-year career at Buckley ANG Base, which ended with retirement in



2003.

That was just the beginning of a new adventure. This fantastic woman married Rich Guerrero (MSCPVA Longtime Member) in 1977 and the family expanded to three grown children, three grandchildren and six great grandchildren.

This volunteer proceeded to join the MSCPVA Auxiliary between 2011 and 2012 with abundant fervor. This included becoming the Secretary/ Treasurer in 2016 and holding that position until July of this year. People, that is over seven years of dedicated service!

Furthermore, she has donated numerous hours toward canvassing for donations and has helped with many Bowl-a-thons, fundraisers, and functions.

In addition, to our organization, she is currently the Grand Ruler with the Aurora Elks Lodge #1923, but still manages to make every MSCPVA Auxiliary meeting.

We are pleased to present this year's MSCPVA Auxiliary Volunteer of the Year Award to

Arliss Guerrero!

Women's Veterans Retreat!!

The Mountain States Chapter is hosting the first-ever Women's Veterans Retreat on November 17 - 18, 2023. Not only is this the first for MSC, but no other PVA chapters have hosted one, either.

Meet other women veterans within the chapter, learn about the chapter and PVA national, see what adaptive sports might be available to you and your family, find ways you can help make the Mountain States Chapter even better and so much more.

The retreat will be held at the **Denver Marriott South at Park Meadows**.

The chapter will pay for the hotel room for two nights - plan on arriving on Thursday evening. We will begin the retreat on Friday morning after you have breakfast on your own. Sessions will be held all morning and then we will have lunch for everyone, followed by afternoon sessions. Following this we will have dinner and then a game night. During the dinner and game night members of the Mountain States Chapter Board of Directors will be present to answer any questions you have, or just so you can get to know them. On Saturday we will begin again after breakfast with a few more sessions and will close by noon.

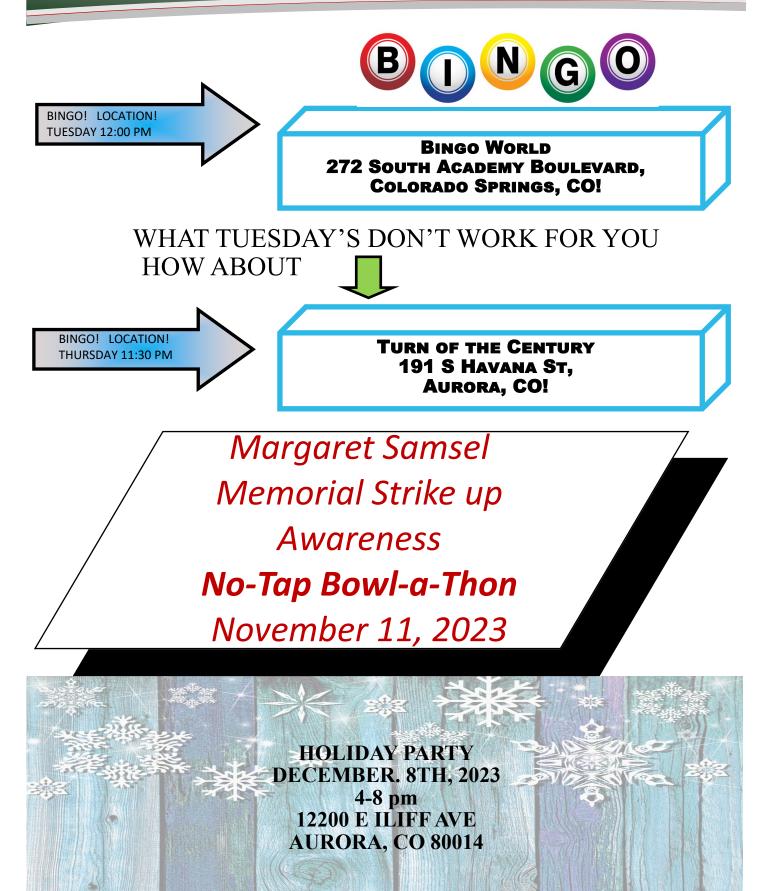
So, the total cost to you will be travel to the hotel, breakfast for the two mornings and we are asking for a **\$25** registration fee.

If you need help to afford to attend the retreat, please let us know. We will have some scholarships available.

Please let Erin Cavit, 970-944-0191, or etcavit56@gmail.com know if you want to attend.

MSCPVA CALENDAR (QUESTIONS ON AN EVENT? CALL THE OFFICE)







Washington Update

Check out the PVAction Force page to view alerts and a list of key legislation.

APPROPRIATIONS UPDATE

The House and Senate remain far apart on a spending deal to keep the federal government funded and fully operational beyond September 30. The White House has started warning federal agencies they should be prepared to close. In the event that happens, VA medical care will continue unabated, as will burials at VA cemeteries. Disabled veterans, their dependents, and survivors will continue to receive their payments from the VA and appeals will be processed. However, VA regional offices would have to close and services like career counseling, transition assistance, and cemetery grounds maintenance would be unavailable. 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.

DOT SETTLEMENT ANNOUNCED IN RESPONSE TO COMPLAINT OF DISABILITY RIGHTS ADVOCATE ENGRACIA FIGUEROA

On September 28, PVA and three other disability organizations issued a joint statement in response to a <u>settlement agreement</u> between the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) and United Airlines following a complaint from the late disability rights advocate Engracia Figueroa.

In July 2021, Figueroa returned home to Los Angeles after speaking at a rally in Washington, D.C. and discovered the airline had severely damaged her custom wheelchair. Stuck in a low-quality manual wheelchair for five hours at the airport, the airline sent her home in an ill-fitting loaner chair. After spending weeks in an improper chair fighting for the airline to fix her wheelchair, Figueroa developed pressure ulcers that became infected and spread to her bones. Despite emergency surgeries, she passed away on October 31, 2021.

The DOT settlement with United requires the airline to undertake a number of efforts to improve the air travel experience of wheelchair users. Specifically, the settlement requires the airline to:

- Roll out a flight filter on its booking engine to make it easier for passengers who use wheelchairs to find flights where their wheelchairs can fit and be safely transported.
- Refund the fare difference for passengers with wheelchairs that use the flight filter when the passenger's preferred flight cannot accommodate their wheelchair and the flight that they travel on with their wheelchair is more expensive.
- Conduct a pilot program to explore whether additional equipment, such as a medical wheelchair or other form of moveable or nonmoveable chair, can be utilized to safely accommodate passengers waiting for loaner

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wheelchairs because of damage or delay to their personal wheelchairs during a flight.

- Provide passengers whose wheelchairs were damaged or delayed accommodation options, including United ensuring the timely delivery of the loaner wheelchair to the passenger, as part of the pilot program.
- Seek feedback from each passenger who checks a wheelchair for transport in the aircraft cargo compartment. United will take the feedback into consideration when developing and enhancing its practices and procedures for handling wheelchairs.

The joint statement released by PVA says that, "While nothing can erase the pain and suffering Engracia endured, nor bring her back to her family and community, we recognize the actions that United Airlines will be required to take as part of the settlement with the [DOT] and see it as an important first step forward in acknowledging the challenges and real dangers that many people with disabilities encounter when they travel by air." It further states, however that "much more needs to be done to increase air travel accessibility and prevent injury and loss of life."

VETERAN FAMILIES HEALTH SERVICES ACT REINTRODUCED

On September 14, Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA), Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Rep. Rick Larsen (D-WA), and Rep. Sara Jacobs (D-CA) introduced the PVA-supported Veteran Families Health Services Act of 2023 (H.R. 5492/S. 2801). This legislation would help servicemembers and veterans build their families by allowing for cryopreservation before deployments, providing adoption assistance, and increasing access to IVF and other forms of Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART).

Increasing access to ART and other infertility treatments is a priority for PVA. Veterans should have access to a full medical benefits package through VA to ensure that they have the care and support needed to grow their families. You can find the legislation <u>here</u> and can read Sen. Murray's press release <u>here</u>.

HOUSE PASSES FOUR VETERANS-RELATED BILLS

On September 21, the House passed four veteransrelated bills. They included H.R. 1530, the Veterans Benefits Improvement Act, which would improve VA benefits accessibility by requiring VA to publish disability benefit questionnaires on the VA's website for use by a veteran's private provider. It also requires a report on improving access to travel reimbursement pay for veterans living abroad who must attend a disability exam. Other provisions in the bill will improve communication regarding the scheduling of disability exams between contractors, veterans, and the veteran's accredited representative.

Another bill, the Isakson-Roe Education Oversight Expansion Act (H.R. 3981), would strengthen reporting requirements imposed on entities that are recipients of GI Bill education benefits. This bill requires educational entities to self-report any noncompliance within 30 day. Schools that have not reported any compliance issues and are found not to be compliant may face additional penalties. It also requires the VA to create a previously mandated database of risk-based surveys within 180 days to ensure programs receiving federal funds are legitimate and properly serving their veteran populations.

The two remaining bills strengthen benefits for children of Vietnam veterans born with spina bifida (S. 112) and designate the VA clinic in Gallup, New Mexico, as the Hiroshi "Hershey" Miyamura VA Clinic (S. 475). H.R. 1530 and H.R. 3981 will be headed to the Senate for their consideration, whereas S. 112 and S. 475 are headed to the President for his signature.

HOUSE COMMITTEES SCRUTINIZE VA'S ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORD MODERNIZATION EFFORT

In mid-September, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs (MILCON/VA) and the House Veterans' Affairs

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Committee (HVAC) held oversight hearings on VA's Electronic Health Record (EHR) modernization project. In May 2018, VA awarded Cerner a contract to replace its current EHR systems with the commercial off-the-shelf solution, Cerner Millennium. Late in 2021, Cerner merged with another digital information system provider, Oracle, and has since become known as Oracle Cerner. Currently, just five of VA's major medical facilities are using the new EHR because problems with user experience, patient safety, and frequent blackouts forced VA to pause any further rollouts until these issues are resolved.

Witnesses from VA and Oracle participated in the hearing before the MILCON/VA Subcommittee and did their best to convince lawmakers that progress is being made to correct problems with the new system. However, members of the Subcommittee were skeptical, with multiple expressions of concern over the cost of the project, delays, user dissatisfaction, and lack of transparency over what is being done and what still needs to be done throughout the question and answer session.

Lawmakers' frustrations with the EHR project were more visible during the HVAC hearing. Chairman Mike Bost (R-IL) expressed a lack of confidence in Oracle Cerner and that the VA made the project worse by requiring customization. He made it clear that the VA should not deploy the new EHR to any more sites until the current problems are resolved and the five original sites are fully operational.

Similar sentiments were expressed by HVAC Ranking Member Mark Takano (D-CA) who noted that legislation, such as a new bill introduced by him and the Chairman, was needed to provide additional tools to oversee the program. Questions over costs, patient safety, diminished provider productivity and satisfaction using the system, interoperability between the Department of Defense and the VA, training, and overall usability of the system dominated the question and answer portion of the hearing. Among those issues, diminished provider productivity and satisfaction stood out because none of the VA facilities using the new system have yet to achieve the same level of productivity and satisfaction it had with the Veterans Health Information Systems Technology and Architecture (VistA). You can watch a video of the HVAC hearing <u>here</u>.

EO SUBCOMMITTEE HOLDS HEARING ON VA EDUCATION BENEFITS

On September 20, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, Economic Opportunity (EO) Subcommittee held a hearing titled, "Less is More: The Impact of Bureaucratic Red Tape on Veterans Education Benefits."

The focus of the discussion was risk-based surveys that are intended to be administered when a VA-approved campus falls out of compliance. In 2017, with the passage of the Forever GI Bill, State Approving Agencies (SAA) were tasked with evaluating the risk of programs that harm student veterans, have improper financial practices, and those identified as potential bad actors. The Isakson Roe Act in 2020 improved the survey model which rolled out in 2022. SAAs and other oversight partners say that the VA is not working within the intent of the law, often assigning surveys to schools that are compliant.

Testifying at the hearing was VA Education Service Director Joe Garcia; Dr. Joe Wescott, the National Legislative Director for the National Association of State Approving Agencies; and several organizations representing student veterans, college campus programs, and school certifying officials.

The hearing can be watched here.

NEWS OF NOTE

Survey Open to Provide Input on Global War on Terrorism Memorial

The Global War on Terrorism Memorial Foundation is committed to building the most inclusive war memorial in history, telling the entire story of how our nation has waged this multigenerational war, and giving a voice to all whom this conflict has impacted.

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For the first time ever, you can #HelpDesignHistory and give your input on the design of a memorial to be built on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. The campaign will run for 22 days, representing 22 years of America's ongoing fight against terrorism. As part of this campaign, respondents can provide their thoughts, inspiration, and dreams for a memorial that will honor all those impacted by the Global War on Terrorism, including uniformed and non-uniformed military personnel, civilians, their families, and everyday men and women who have sacrificed to protect our freedom.

Take the design survey <u>here</u>. The survey will run through October 17.

VA Seeking Feedback on Awareness on Veterans' Burial Options

The VA is asking veterans, their family, friends, caregivers, and survivors to complete a <u>survey</u> about burial options, concerns, or desires. Survey respondents will help the VA understand awareness of burial options and benefits, end-of-life, and survivor benefits. The survey can be completed in a few minutes and can be shared with others.

WEBINARS & HEARINGS

Access Board Will Host Free Webinar on New Public Rights of Way Final Rule

On October 5, from 2:30-4:00 p.m. E.T., the U.S. Access Board, in partnership with the Great Lakes ADA Center, will host a free <u>webinar</u> on the new <u>public rights-of-way</u> final rule. The webinar will be <u>livestreamed</u>. A recording of the webinar and the presentation materials will be available in the Great Lakes ADA Center's <u>online archives</u> the following week.

The rule's standards cover accessibility for newly constructed or altered facilities or routes, so they are useable and readily accessible for people with disabilities. The rule includes standards for pedestrian access routes, including sidewalks and shared-use paths; accessible pedestrian signals; crosswalks; transit stops, boarding areas, and transit shelters; and on-street parking. Other notable changes are a modified definition of "alteration," defining "developed," slopes ratios and percentages requirements, and passenger loading zones. The Access Board's enforcement authority extends only to federal facilities. The standards will not apply to states, counties, or cities until adopted by the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Upcoming Veterans' Committee Activities

Please visit the <u>House</u> and <u>Senate</u> Veterans' Affairs Committee webpages for information on upcoming hearings and markups.

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SPORTS & RECREATION



Sports and Recreation are a big aspect of the Mountain States Chapter of PVA. Ideally, no matter what type of activities you are interested in as an individual, the chapter should have information available for you on events you may be interested in. If we don't have the information handy, my staff will gladly research opportunities for you and get that information to you. Be sure to check www.mscpva.org, we will to have the event calendar updated soon.

Check the calendrer soon for info on all these upcoming events.....

If you are interested in **skiing or snowboarding,** there are numerous opportunities for you here in Colorado and we can point you to many of them with events at little to no cost to you at all.

Let's not forget about **Pickle Ball, Bowling** and **Cross Fit** just to name a few. All members are currently eligible for up to \$1000/year in scholarship/grant money for a variety of activities.

Frisbee Golf Denver VA Oct 28th 1-4 pm Bocce Denver VA November 11th 1-4pm Bowl –n– Thon Kingpin Lanes Colorado Springs start time 2pm

Day of the Tread - New Mexico VA

• October 29, 2023

• Are you interested in riding with other Veteran during the Day of the Tread?? Tate Kiraly will be working to head up the team registering for the event. We will be riding as a group in the 23 mile route. You must register yourself for the event https://dayofthetread.com/ After you choose the 23 mile ride go to the next page and join a team "Roll'in Chili Peppers" Cost \$71.34

• There will be drop in training rides lead by veterans leading up to the event



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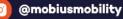






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