

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office
St. Petersburg, FL

June 2008



The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete.

OVERVIEW OF CHANGES MADE BY PUBLIC LAW 110-181 THE NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2008 On January 28, 2008, the President signed the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for fiscal year 2008. Among the provisions affecting VA benefits are:

Enhancement of education benefits for certain members of reserve components. This section allows an accelerated payment of educational assistance under the Montgomery GI Bill-Selected Reserves and the Reserve Educational Assistance Program (REAP). REAP provides educational benefits for members of Reserve components called or ordered to active duty in response to a war or national emergency (contingency operation).

Eligible participants must be enrolled in an approved program of education not exceeding two years in duration and not leading to an associate, bachelors, masters, or other degree, and charged tuition and fees for the program of education that, when divided by the number of months (and fractions thereof) in the enrollment period, exceeds the amount equal to 200 percent of the monthly rate of educational assistance allowance otherwise payable.

This section also amends REAP by allowing a member with an aggregate of three years or more of active service to contribute towards his or her educational assistance to receive the maximum amount of assistance.

Extension of period of entitlement to educational assistance for certain members of the selected reserve affected by force shaping initiatives. This section provides that Selected Reserve members who are involuntarily separated during the time period beginning on October 1, 2007, and ending on September 30, 2014, retain their eligibility for educational assistance after they leave the Selected Reserves.

Time limit for use of educational assistance benefit for certain members of reserve components and resumption of benefit. This section applies only to

reservists eligible for REAP. Members who were called up from the Selected Reserve, completed their REAP qualifying period of active duty service, and then returned to the Selected Reserve for the remainder of their service contract are now eligible for REAP benefits during the 10-year period following separation from the Selected Reserve.

Expansion of Combat-Related Special Compensation eligibility. This section expands eligibility for Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) to military retirees retired for disability through the military disability evaluation system with less than 20 years of service for longevity purposes.

These amendments take effect on January 1, 2008, and apply to payments for months beginning on or after that date. As with existing CRSC benefits, the retiree must apply to their service-specific CRSC Board for a determination once VA establishes entitlement to compensation.

Inclusion of veterans with service-connected disabilities rated as total by reason of unemployability under termination of phase-in of concurrent receipt of retired pay and veterans' disability compensation.

This section provides that veterans receiving disability compensation based on a VA determination of individual unemployability (IU) are no longer subject to a phase-in of concurrent receipt.

Entitlement to full receipt of concurrent retirement and disability pay (CRDP) benefits for military retirees entitled to IU benefits is December 31, 2004; however payment may not be made for any amounts due before October 1, 2008.

Enhancement of disability severance pay for members of the armed forces. This section, among other things, provides that disability severance pay will not be recouped from VA disability compensation for those veterans awarded disability severance pay for disabilities incurred in

a combat zone or during performance of duty in combat-related operations as designated by DoD.

The amendments made by this section are effective January 28, 2008, and apply to affected members of the Armed Forces separated on or after that date.

HYPERTENSION AND HERBICIDE EXPOSURE Every two years, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) of the National Academies reviews evidence about the health effects of exposure to herbicides. In its recent release IOM reported findings of limited or suggestive evidence that exposure to herbicides is associated with an increased chance of developing high blood pressure (hypertension). A finding of "limited or suggestive evidence" means that evidence suggests an association between exposure to herbicides and the outcome, but a firm conclusion is limited because chance, bias, and other confounding factors could not be ruled out with confidence.

Under Public Law 102-4, the Agent Orange Act of 1991, as extended by the Veterans Education and Benefits Expansion Act of 2001, Public Law 107-103, the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) must determine whether a presumption of service connection is warranted for each disease IOM identifies as positively associated with herbicide exposure.

The Secretary has not yet decided whether to add hypertension to the list of presumptive disabilities associated with herbicide exposure. If he determines service connection is warranted, VA will publish a regulatory amendment in the Federal Register. If he decides otherwise, VA will publish notice of that decision in the Federal Register.

Veterans potentially affected by the Secretary's decision will include those presumed exposed to herbicides who submit a claim for service connection for hypertension. This includes veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam from January 9, 1962 to May 7, 1975 and along the demilitarized zone (DMZ) in Korea from April 1968 to July 1969.

VA will decide claims for service connection for hypertension based on exposure to herbicides after the Secretary makes the determination. If the Secretary decides there is a relationship, VA will issue necessary regulations. Once the regulations are final, VA will decide claims. If the Secretary decides there is insufficient evidence linking hypertension to herbicide exposure, VA will publish a notice in the Federal Register and begin deciding claims 60 days thereafter.

IMPORTANT DATES IN JUNE

June 9 last day to input change of address or establish direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 07-01-2008 payments

June 20 last day to change or cancel direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 07-01-2008 payments

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 1-800-827-1000

Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022 1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)
Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications 1-877-823-2378

VA EFT Information Hotline (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) 1-877-838-2778

Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline (medical care) - 1-877-222-8387

VA Health Revenue Service (information on amounts owed to VA Medical Centers) 1-866-793-4591

VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 1-800-669-8477

VA Health Administration Center (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -
CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023
CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024
Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 1-800-733-8387

Foreign Medical Program Office (medical treatment abroad) -
PO Box 65021, Denver, CO 80206-5021 303-331-7590

National Cemeteries

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL 727-398-9426
6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 33513 352-793-7740
6501 S State Rd 7, Lake Worth, FL 33467 561-649-6489
4083 Lannie Rd, Jacksonville FL 32218 904-358-3510
Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL 850-453-4108/4846
9810 State Hwy 72, Sarasota FL 877-861-9840

National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs (headstones and markers) - 5109 Russell Rd Quantico VA 22134-3903 1-800-697-6947

Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center (certificates of eligibility) PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120 1-888-244-6711

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit - Chicago VA Regional Office 1-800-829-4833

INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:

VA Web Site: www.va.gov

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) www.warms.vba.va.gov

St. Petersburg VA Regional Office:

www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete

Property Management (sale of VA-repossessed homes): www.ocwen.com

Florida Dept of Veterans Affairs: www.floridavets.org

"Florida Vets First:" www.FloridaVetsFirst.com