

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

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

February 2009



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.

ERIC K SHINSEKI SWORN IN (VA News Release)

WASHINGTON – Retired Army Gen. Eric K. Shinseki took the oath of office as the Nation's seventh Secretary of Veterans Affairs, assuming the leadership of the Department of Veterans Affairs following confirmation by the Senate.

Born in 1942 on the island of Kauai, Hawaii, Secretary Shinseki graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., in 1965. He served two combat tours and was wounded in action in Vietnam. He served with distinction in Europe, the Pacific and stateside, eventually becoming the Army's senior leader from June 1999 to June 2003. Retired from military service in August 2003, his military decorations include three Bronze Stars and two Purple Hearts.

VA ON-LINE APPLICATIONS (VONAPP) Three additional C&P forms have been added to VONAPP. VA will now receive VA Forms 21-530 (*Application for Burial Benefits*), 21-686c (*Declaration of Status of Dependents*), and 21-4138 (*Statement in Support of Claim*) electronically.

Additionally, VONAPP now allows veterans and claimants to append attachments up to 5MB in size to their electronic claim forms. With the addition of this new functionality, a recognized Power of Attorney (POA) may submit claims via VONAPP on a veteran's behalf. However, the POA must attach a properly signed VA Form 21-22 (*Appointment of Vets Svc Org as Claimant's Rep*) if one is not of record, along with a signature page for the application being filed.

Unpaid creditors, such as funeral homes, who are applying for burial benefits via VONAPP must attach the appropriate signature page signed by the individual(s) who authorized services.

VONAPP is at <http://www.va.gov/onlineapps.htm>.

VA TO OFFER HEALTH CARE TO PREVIOUSLY INELIGIBLE VETERANS (VA News Release)

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today plans to re-open enrollment in its health care system by July 2009 to about 265,000 veterans whose incomes exceed current limits. The change affects

veterans whose incomes exceed the current VA means test and geographic means test income thresholds by 10 percent or less. Congress provided funds in VA's fiscal year 2009 budget to support the new enrollment.

In 1996, Congress established a priority-based enrollment system for VA and a uniform package of medical benefits for all enrollees. The legislation opened enrollment in VA's health care system to all eligible veterans and required that each year the Secretary of Veterans Affairs assess veterans' demand for services and determine if the necessary resources are available to provide timely, quality care to all enrollees.

Enrollment for the lowest priority of the eight groups—veterans who are not being compensated for a military-related disability and who have incomes above a set threshold—was suspended on January 18, 2003, although veterans in that priority group who were already enrolled for care were permitted to remain enrolled.

VA originally suspended enrollment for Priority 8 veterans because it was unable to provide all enrolled veterans with timely access to its health care due to a tremendous growth in the number of veterans then seeking enrollment. VA now plans to reopen enrollment for a portion of these veterans without compromising the Department's ability to provide high quality health care services to all enrolled veterans who are eligible for care.

VA's computer systems are being modified to accommodate the changes, and the Department is preparing communication and education materials to ensure that Congress, veterans service organizations, and the public are aware of the coming changes. The rule will take effect by June 30, 2009, if the regulatory process proceeds smoothly.

ONE MILLION VETERANS SHARE \$320 MILLION IN VA INSURANCE DIVIDENDS (VA News Release)

WASHINGTON – One million veterans are in line to share \$319.8 million in annual insurance dividends during 2009, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). VA

operates one of the nation's largest life insurance programs, providing more than \$1 trillion in coverage to seven million service members, veterans and family members.

The dividend payments are being sent to an estimated one million holders of VA insurance policies **on the anniversary date of their policies**. Sent **automatically** through different payment plans, the amounts vary based on the age of the veteran, the type of insurance, and the length of time the policy has been in force.

The dividends come from the earnings of trust funds into which veterans have paid insurance premiums over the years, and are linked to returns on investments in U.S. government securities.

VA ASSISTING VETERANS WITH HEALTH CARE

COSTS (VA News Release) WASHINGTON -- For veterans struggling financially due to a job loss or decreased income, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers an assortment of programs that can relieve the costs of health care or provide care at no cost.

Veterans whose previous income was ruled too high for VA health care may be able to enter the VA system based upon a hardship if their current year's income is projected to fall below federal income thresholds due to a job loss, separation from service or some other financial setback. Veterans determined eligible due to hardship can avoid copays applied to higher-income veterans. Qualifying veterans may be eligible for enrollment and receive health care at no cost.

Each VA medical center across the country has an enrollment coordinator available to provide veterans information about these programs. Veterans may also contact VA's Health Benefits Service Center at 1-877-222-VETS (8387) or visit the VA health eligibility website at www.va.gov/healtheligibility.

VA RAMPS UP JOB SEARCH FOR INJURED VETERANS

(VA News Release) WASHINGTON – Thirty percent of employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are veterans – the second highest ranking among cabinet departments after the Department of Defense -- and nearly 8 percent of VA employees are service-connected disabled veterans. But the VA intends to increase the number of disabled veterans who obtain employment in its workforce.

All severely injured veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan will be contacted by VA's Veterans Employment Coordination Service to determine their interest in -- and qualifications for -- VA jobs. So far, that office has identified 2,300 severely injured veterans of those wars, of who 600 expressed interest in VA employment.

IMPORTANT DATES IN FEBRUARY

February 16 Federal holiday – Washington's Birthday

February 27 payments for February due

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

SUICIDE PREVENTION 1-800-273-8255

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

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

Federal employment: www.usajobs.opm.gov

Florida Dept of Veterans Affairs: www.floridavets.org

"Florida Vets First:" www.FloridaVetsFirst.com

Library of Congress (information on pending legislation) thomas.loc.gov