

Veterans Corner
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VA funding and Benefits Bills Approved

For the last 13 years, Congress has failed to pass the VA health care funding bill on time, but not this year. Breaking with a bad tradition, Congress adopted a substantial increase in veterans' program funding and saw it signed into law by the President on September 30 – before the October 1 start of the new fiscal year.

Bundled with the Defense and Homeland Security Appropriations bills (H.R. 2638), the VA funding bill includes the following:

- VA MEDICAL SERVICES. \$30.97 billion, including funds to start enrolling more means-tested veterans known as “priority Group 8) veterans in VA care; \$3.8 billion for more mental health services; \$584 million for substance abuse programs; and \$250 million for new generation prosthetics for wounded warriors.
- CLAIMS BACKLOG. 2000 additional disability claims workers to reduce the staggering backlog of claims.
- INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY. \$2.5 billion for IT needs at medical facilities.

Medicare part B to remain Unchanged

For the first time since the year 2000, Medicare Part B premiums will not go up in 2009.

The Medicare Par B monthly premium will be unchanged at \$96.40 next year for most of the 44 million beneficiaries in the U.S. health program for elderly and disabled people.

VA Announces \$36 million in Grants for homeless programs

Homeless veterans in 35 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico will get more assistance, thanks to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) grants providing \$36.7 million to community groups to create 1,526 beds for homeless veterans this year.

Bill Extends Purple Heart to all Deceased Prisoners of War

Bob Filner, Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, announced that the Purple Heart will be presented posthumously to all prisoners of war who die in captivity. The legislation that makes this possible is Bob Filner's bill, the Honor Our Fallen Prisoners of War Act, passed by Congress in 2006. The Department of Defense announced its complete implementation in October 2008.

“The law now presumes that the death of all service members who die in captivity was the result of enemy action or the result of wounds incurred in action with the enemy during capture and imprisonment,” said Chairman Filner (D-CA).

Purple Heart Fact – It’s a federal felony offense for an individual to falsely claim to have been awarded the Purple Heart. Individuals convicted of violating the Stolen Valor Act of 2005 face jail sentences of up to one year and/or fines.

Dependency and Indemnity Compensation to Surviving Spouses

The monthly rate of DIC to the surviving spouse is \$1154 (effective 12/1/08). For each dependant child under the age of 18, and additional \$286 is payable. If the surviving spouse is entitled to A&A, an additional \$286 is payable. If the surviving spouse is entitled to Housebound, an additional \$135 is payable.

The additional allowance payable where the veteran was rated totally disabled for at least 8 years immediately preceding death is \$246.

Coming Events

Honor our Deceased Veteran Program for the month of February will be on the 24th, 2009 at 2:30pm at the Saratoga County Building on McMaster Street in Ballston Spa. We will be honoring Stephen Biss, Julia Biss, Michael Bill and John Biss from the Town of Wilton. The General public is invited.