

Veterans Corner
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By: Robert G. Mitchell

VA Backlog Tops 900,000

VA's backlog of pending claims and appeals was more than 905,000 as of July 18, according to VA statistics. That represents an increase of some 15% from last year.

VA's backlog includes over 737,000 unprocessed claims – of which about 20% had been pending beyond 180 days – and approximately 173,000 appeals awaiting decision.

Spouse Residency Relief Act

The Senate Veterans Affairs Committee has approved the military Spouse Residency Relief Act (S.475., Senator Burr, R-NC), which would let a spouse choose the same state of residency as the service member. If passed, it would reduce some administrative and tax filing difficulties incurred by spouses as they relocate, and let them vote in the same state as their service member.

Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis

Last September the Secretary of Veterans Affairs made amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) a presumptively compensable illness for all Veterans with 90 or more of continuous active service in the military. As a result, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) can now pay disability compensation to Veterans with ALS. Their survivors are also eligible for VA benefits.

In an effort to provide Veterans this new and much needed support, VA sent notification letters to Veterans with ALS advising them of their potential eligibility for disability compensation benefits. On August 13, 2009, VA sent outreach letters to 1,864 Veterans and survivors across the country. Unfortunately, VA made a coding error and a number of veterans who should not have received this letter did. The Department is reviewing individual claims files for all the recipients of this letter to identify those who received it by mistake.

VA employees are calling Veterans and survivors to ensure that they understand the purpose of the letter, explain why they mistakenly reviewed the letter and express VA's sincere apologies for the distress caused by this unfortunate and regrettable error. For more information on filing an ALS claim contact the Saratoga County Veterans Service Agency Robert Mitchell at 518-884-4115.

Veterans Affairs Helps Veteran Small-Business Owners

More than 1,000 veterans who own small businesses and seek to do more contracting with the federal government recently heard Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K.

Shinseki extol the importance of small businesses and reaffirm the commitment of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to help veterans start or expand their companies.

“If Veterans tell us their definition of success, we’ll put our capabilities behind them,” Shinseki said July 21 at the government-sponsored national Veteran Small Business Conference in Las Vegas.

VA has a special unit, the Center for Veterans Enterprise, which offers a variety of services to Veterans wanting to start or expand a business. These include one-on-one coaching, referrals for business training, listening in an online database for potential clients and verification of the Veterans status of those registrants.

More information about the Department’s services to the owners of small businesses is available on the Internet at www.va.gov/oamm.

VA Accepting Application for Post 9/11 GI Bill Benefits

As of August 1, 2009 the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today that Veterans can begin submitting applications online for the Post 9/11 GI Bill. “There is no better investment than education,” said Tammy Duckworth, VA’s assistant Secretary for public and intergovernmental affairs. “The Post 9/11 GI Bill will provide new opportunities that are essential to our Veterans, our workforce and our economy.”

Veterans, Service Members, reservists and National Guard members with active duty since September 10, 2001, may be eligible for this benefit. Veterans will remain eligible for benefits for 15 years from the date of last discharge or release from a period of active duty of at least 90 continuous days.

Eligible applicants must have served for an aggregate period of at least 90 days since September 10, 2001, or served at least 30 continuous days on active duty since September 10, 2001, and received a discharge for a disability. For more information call 1-888-442-4551 or visit www.GIBILL.VA.gov.