

Veterans Corner
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By: Robert G. Mitchell

American Legion Family Support Network

The American Legion's Family Support Network stand assists military families while service members serve overseas with such chores as grocery shopping, childcare, lawn care, fixing the family car and countless other challenges to a military spouse. Family members can call toll-free 1-800-504-4098, complete the electronic request form (see: www.legion.org/activeduty/index.php?content=assistance_request) or e-mail familysupport@legion.org to ask for assistance. Provide details of the need, and local, volunteer American Legion members will contact your family to determine if and how assistance can be provided.

New wave of Disability Claims Adds to Backlog

Twenty seven percent of recently discharged combat veterans from Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom are lodging claims for service-connected permanent disabilities with the VA, according to documents obtained by the National Security Archive – a non-partisan research group affiliated to George Washington University.

This is prompting serious concern about whether VA has sufficient resources to prove and pay for the increasing number of claims. The situation is compounding the claims backlog from the 1991 Gulf War in which 32 percent of veterans filed for service-connected permanent disabilities. VA has been criticized for averaging 174 days to process an initial benefits claim with an accuracy rate of 88 percent. Rep. Steve Buyer (Ind.), Chairman House Veterans Affairs Committee, has proposed that 200 additional claims adjudicators be hired to deal with the backlog and that \$400,000 budgeted to train them.

Individual Unemployability

Individual Unemployability (IU) recognizes that the effects of certain service-connected conditions, while not meeting the VA's criteria for permanent and total disability, may interfere with a veteran's ability to work and support themselves. Individuals who meet the criteria for IU receive benefits equivalent to veterans who are 100% Service Connected. The criteria for consideration is one disability ratable at 60% or more, or two or more disabilities; one of which is at least 40% and which total 70% or more combined evaluations. If you are rated with IU, I advise you not to work because VA will cross reference with the IRS and you will lose your IU status. For further information on Individual Unemployability please contact Robert Mitchell at 518-884-4115.

Employment Questionnaire

VA recently sent out Form 21-4140-1 to all Unemployable (IU) veterans. Before completing that form I urge you to contact this office or the office where you filed your claim to make sure you are filling it out correctly. If it is incorrect you may lose your IU rating. For an appointment call the Saratoga County VSA at 518-884-4115.

Veterans with Service Connected Disabilities

This information is of critical importance to those military veterans who have a service connected disability rating from 0%-100%.

The Veterans Affairs (VA) recently changed its practice regarding eligibility for Hearing Aids and Eyeglasses. Under the new policy the VA now specifies that they will provide hearing aids and eyeglasses at no charge. For more information please call the VA Medical Center, Albany, Service Center at 518-626-6721.

New Vets in Congress

Only 6 of 60 new members elected to the House or Senate during the past elections have military experience:

House

- Partick Murphy (D-PA)
- Joe Sestak (D-PA)
- Chris Carney (D-PA)
- Phil Hare (D-IL)
- Tim Walz (D-MN)

Senate

- Jim Webb (D-VA)

Assisted Living/Nursing Home Pension

Last Friday (February 23, 2007) NBC News aired veterans/spouse may be eligible for a VA Pension with Aid and Attendance or Housebound due to Nursing Home or Assisted Living Care. My February Veterans Corner covered this issue. Individuals employed by private companies are targeting elderly claimants at assisted living facilities and are charging them \$600-\$900 to process this type of pension. All VA claims are processed free of charge by your local state or county veterans service agency. If you have any questions, please call Bob Mitchell at the Saratoga County Veterans Office 518-884-4115 for more details.