CALVET
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

JANUARY 2011

newsletter

VA URGES VETERANS TO SIGN UP FOR DIRECT DEPOSITS

Treasury Publishes Final Regulation to Phase Out Paper Checks by 2013

The Department of the Treasury announced a new rule that will extend the safety and convenience of electronic payments to millions of Americans and phase out paper checks for federal benefits by March 1, 2013. Officials at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) urge Veterans to sign up for electronic payment of their benefits.

"California Veterans have an opportunity here with this new feature to receive their federal VA benefits quickly and securely through this new electronic deposit feature and I would encourage all of them to sign up for this service," said Acting Secretary for CalVet, Rocky Chavez.

On March 1, 2013, VA will stop issuing paper checks. People who do not have electronic payments for their federal benefits by that time will receive their funds via a pre-paid debit card. Called the Direct Express card, it is issued by Comerica Bank as the financial agent of the U.S. Treasury.

Another deadline affects people receiving VA's compensation or pensions for the first time after May 1, 2011. Those people will automatically receive the benefits electronically.

Anyone already receiving federal benefit payments electronically will be unaffected by the changes. To learn more about the federal government's switch to direct deposit—or to change VA benefits to direct deposit—visit www.GoDirect.org. Information about the federal government's "Go Direct" campaign is also available at (800) 333-1795.

Along with payments for VA benefit, the change will also affect recipients of payments from Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, Railroad Retirement Board, or Office of Personnel Management.

For more information about VA benefits and programs, go to www.va.gov or call toll free (800) 827-1000.

STOP-LOSS PAY DEADLINE EXTENDED AGAIN

Congress has extended the deadline for the retroactive stop-loss pay program until March 4.

"Those California men and women who were impacted by the stop-loss program have an opportunity here that will benefit them and their families and time is running out," said Acting Secretary for CalVet, Rocky Chavez.

This is the fourth time Congress has extended the program, which is meant to compensate troops who were stop-lossed between September 2001 and September 2008. Troops or their surviving spouses can receive $500 for each month that a servicemember was kept beyond his or her initial separation date.

Of the 145,000 people eligible for the program, about 71,000—fewer than half—have been paid, according to the Defense Finance and Accounting Service.

Visit www.defense.gov/home/features/2010/0710_stoploss to get your stop loss pay before it's too late.

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REMINDER All veterans are reminded that the fastest way to inquire and secure the benefits you have earned is by visiting your local County Veterans Service Office. A listing of these offices is available at www.cacvso.org or on CalVet's website at www.calvet.ca.gov/resources/database.aspx

IMPROVING EDUCATION ASSISTANCE FOR VETERANS

Congress has implemented several important changes to the Post 9-11 GI Bill that will impact all veterans who want to use this important benefit.

Chapter 33, Educational Assistance benefit also known as the Post 9/11 GI Bill is said to be the best educational benefit the VA could have ever administered, but yet there were flaws and exclusions that had disinterested a large number of veterans. These changes should make educational and employment goals more attainable and benefits more user friendly to those veterans that were previously excluded. With a majority vote in Congress this bill awaits signature from the President. After the President signs this bill most changes will take affect in the Fall of 2011.

Student Veteran Organizations and Veteran Service Organizations across the nation are ecstatic about these changes especially for those student veterans seeking certifications, licenses or attending vocational or trade schools. Students enrolled in 100% online education will receive a housing stipend and those veterans with Bachelors degrees can have the cost of their Masters paid for. "These changes are great, I will not have to worry about footing the bill when I start my Masters program," said Roger Jones an Undergraduate at the California State University Sacramento and member of the Sacramento Veterans Organization.

Here are some of the changes to expect from this legislation:

- All public school costs paid (incl Masters/PhDs)
- Private school costs capped at $17,500
  - Yellow Ribbon Program still applies above $17,500
  - No longer a need for individual state caps
- Prorates Housing Allowance to training time
  - (i.e. training at ¾ time = ¾ housing allowance)
- Pays Housing Allowance for those solely in distance learning
- Pays half the Nat'l avg. of $1348
- Coverage for National Guard members on State duty (Title 32)
- Eliminates "interval" payments
  - (i.e. unable to pay benefits over winter Holiday period.)
- Expands coverage to Non-College Degree Programs, On-the-Job Training, Apprenticeship, and Flight
- Expands reimbursement to multiple Licensing and Certification tests
- Increases reporting fees paid to schools from $7 to $12 per student per year
- Allow Vocational Rehabilitation participants to elect the higher Housing Allowance offered by Post-9/11 GI Bill if otherwise eligible for Post-9/11 GI Bill
- Pays book stipend to Active Duty members
- Pays Housing Allowance rate changes beginning in August in lieu of January.
- Provides Transfer of Entitlement benefits to Public Health Service and NOAA personnel.
- Deems programs offered at accredited public and private-not-for-profit schools approved for VA Education benefits
- Allows VA to use SAAs for compliance and oversight

INCREASE IN YOUR VETERANS GROUP LIFE INSURANCE (VGLI) COVERAGE

Recent legislation may allow you to increase your VGLI coverage. **Veterans' Benefit Act of 2010 (H.R. 3219**) was enacted on October 13, 2010, and is effective April 11, 2011.

You can increase your VGLI coverage up to $25,000 under the following guidelines:

- You must request the additional coverage during the 120-day period prior to your 5-year VGLI anniversary.
- Your total amount of coverage cannot exceed $400,000.
- You must be under age 60 on the coverage effective date of your 5-year VGLI anniversary.

Your 5-year VGLI anniversary

- You can find out the date of your 5-year VGLI year anniversary from your VGLI online account or by calling the Contact Center at (800) 419-1473. To access or create your online VGLI account, please visit www.insurance.va.gov.
- You will receive a notice 120-days in advance of your 5-year VGLI anniversary.

Amount of Coverage

- If your coverage is $375,000 or less, you can purchase $25,000 additional VGLI coverage. Amounts less than $25,000 are not allowed if your current coverage is $375,000 or less.
- If your coverage is more than $375,000, you can purchase the amount that increases your coverage to $400,000.

No Medical Questions

- If you enroll during the 120-day period prior to your 5-year VGLI anniversary, you do not have to answer any medical questions.

Effective January 2011, VGLI premium payment address will change to:

The Prudential Insurance Company of America
Office of Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance
P.O. Box 660251
Dallas, TX 75266-0251

For more information, contact OSGLI at (800) 419-1473, 8:00am - 5:00pm (ET).

veterans services

FUND AVAILABILITY UNDER THE SUPPORTIVE SERVICES FOR VETERAN FAMILIES PROGRAM

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is announcing the availability of funds for supportive services grants under the Supportive Services for Veteran Families Program (SSVF Program). The Notice contains information concerning the SSVF Program, application process, and amount of funding available.

The SSVF Program's purpose is to provide supportive services grants to private non-profit organizations and consumer cooperatives who will coordinate or provide supportive services to very low-income veteran families who: (i) Are residing in permanent housing, (ii) are homeless and scheduled to become residents of permanent housing within a specified time period, or (iii) after exiting permanent housing within a specified time period, are seeking other housing that is responsive to such very low-income veteran family's needs and preferences.

Approximately $50 million is available for supportive services grants to be funded under this Notice for a 1-year period. The maximum allowable grant size is $1,000,000.00 per year per grantee. Applications for assistance under the SSVF Program must be received by the SSVF Program Office by 4 p.m. Eastern Time on March 11, 2011.

For more information, please visit www.federalregister.gov/articles/2010/12/17/2010-31742/fund-availability-under-the-supportive-services-for-veteran-families-program#p-3.

For questions contact John Kuhn, Supportive Services for Veteran Families Program Office, National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans, 4100 Chester Avenue, Suite 201, Philadelphia, PA 19104; (877) 737-0111 (toll-free).

Operation Welcome Home:
www.veterans.ca.gov

Support:
www.gwtvetsinneed.org

Relief:
www.afrtrust.org

Job Fair:
www.military.com/career-expo/

Assistance:
www.jointservicessupport.org

Veterans & Families:
www.veteransandfamilies.org

OUR SOCIAL NETWORKS!

UPCOMING events

CalVet News
1227 O Street, Room 300
Sacramento, CA 95814
P (916) 653-2192
F (916) 653-2611
pao@calvet.ca.gov

JP Tremblay
Deputy Secretary, Communications

JP Tremblay
Editor

Thomas Moralez
Graphic Designer

Angela Slater
Graphic Designer

JANUARY 15

Dedication of a Pearl Harbor Memorial
Northern California Veterans Cemetery
11800 Gas Point Road, Igo, CA 96047-0076
1:00 pm

Disabled American Veterans Information Seminar
Veterans Memorial Hall
247 S. Imperial Ave, Imperial, CA
12:00 pm
Contact: (619) 299-6916

JANUARY 21

Northern California Inter-Service Family Assistant Committee
Holiday Inn Express
42200 Albrea Street, Fremont, CA 94538
9:30 am - 2:00 pm
Contact: Debbie Skolnik, (707) 974-8004

JANUARY 22

Disabled American Veterans Voluntary Services
Radison Hotel
500 Leisure Lane, Sacramento, CA 95815
9:00 am
Contact: (619) 299-6916

FEBRUARY 2

Career Expo sponsored by CivilianJobs.com
South Mesa Club
202850 San Jacinto Road
Camp Pendleton, CA 92055
10 a.m. to 2 p.m, Contact: (678) 819-4132

FEBRUARY 4

Disabled American Veterans Information Seminar
Murrieta Senior Center
41717 Juniper Street, Murrieta, CA 92563
11:45 am, Contact: (619) 299-6916

Note: To view more events, visit www.veterans.ca.gov/news.shtml

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ENHANCED VA HEALTH CARE ENROLLMENT OPPORTUNITY CLOSING FOR CERTAIN COMBAT VETERANS

WASHINGTON (Jan. 10, 2011) - Certain combat Veterans who were discharged from active duty service before Jan. 28, 2003 have until Jan. 27, 2011 to take advantage of their enhanced health care enrollment opportunity through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

"While there is no time limit for Veterans to apply for the VA health care they earned with their service, I highly encourage this group of combat Veterans to take advantage of the enhanced enrollment window to use their health care benefits through this simplified process," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "VA has health care eligibility specialists online and at every medical center eager to help Veterans take advantage of this opportunity."

The enhanced enrollment window was provided for in Public Law 110-181, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008. That law gave combat Veterans who served after Nov. 11, 1998 but separated from service before Jan. 28, 2003, and did not enroll before Jan. 28, 2008, three years, beginning on Jan. 28, 2008, to apply for the enhanced enrollment opportunity.

These Veterans will still be able to apply for health benefits with VA after Jan. 27, but will have their status for receiving VA health care determined under normal VA procedures that base health care priority status on the severity of a service-connected disability or other eligibility factors. This would mean some Veterans could face income or asset-based restrictions, as well as delays in establishing their VA health care eligibility while their disability status is determined.

Since the inception of the enhanced enrollment opportunity, VA has sent more than 750,000 personal letters to eligible Veterans and hosted thousands of outreach efforts through OIF/OEF and enrollment coordinators stationed at every VA medical center.

Since June 2010, VA sent another 194,000 personal letters to give every eligible Veteran a chance to take advantage of this opportunity, but to date only 13,000 of these Veterans have enrolled.

The law does continue to provide the enhanced health care enrollment window to combat Veterans who were discharged or released from active service on or after January 28, 2003. For these Veterans, the five-year enrollment period begins on the discharge or separation date of the service member from active duty military service, or in the case of multiple call-ups, the most recent discharge date.

Veterans can apply for enrollment online at www.1010ez.med.va.gov/sec/vha/1010ez, by contacting VA at (877) 222-VETS (8387) or with the help of a VA health care eligibility specialist at any VA medical center. Go to www2.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp for locations. For more information regarding enrollment, visit VA's eligibility site at www.va.gov/healtheligibility.

Green Job Training for Veterans

Training Opportunities in High-Growth Industries at No Cost to Qualified Veterans

Program Highlights

- Qualify for career opportunities in the growing field of green technology.
- Earn college credit and state certification
- Training is offered at no cost by Swords to Plowshares to qualified veterans.
- Enrollment is first come, first serve.

ENSYS 260/130, Math for Solar and CONST 150Q: Photovoltaic Installation, with NABCEP cert. Including the Math for Solar Workshop and Green Building 1.
Dates: January 11 – April 13, 2011
Days: First two weeks Tuesday and Thursday, the rest of class Monday and Wednesday
Time: 9:00 am – 3:30 pm
Description: In this class you will earn college credits and learn the fundamentals of Green Building/Construction practices. In addition, you will learn how to install Solar and Solar Thermal panels. You will also be able to design and install Solar Photovoltaic systems from the ground up. We included a two weeks preparation for the NABCEP Entry Level Exam, which you will take upon completion of class.
Location: Diablo Valley College, Pleasant Hill, CA
Number of Students: 25

REQUIREMENTS

****DISCHARGED FROM ACTIVE DUTY AFTER SEP 11, 2001****

- Possess a DD-214
- Possess a valid state issued driver's license and personally owned vehicle
- Possess a social security card
- Are physically able to install solar panels
- Can pass a basic Math and Reading assessment test
- Experience in the construction industry preferred

For more info:

Coleen Evans
Case Manager/Outreach Specialist
415-558-8870 ext. 202
cevans@stp-sf.org

SOLDIERS MAKE ANNUAL MARCH TO VETERANS HOME

By Jessica Cejnar
Staff Writer, Desert Dispatch

The holiday season may be over for most people, but not for soldiers in Fort Irwin's 11th Armored Calvary Regiment or the residents at the Veterans Home.

About 300 soldiers from the National Training Center will be bussed to the Harvey House, march across the First Street Bridge, through downtown Barstow and up Barstow Road to the Veterans Home Friday to have lunch and visit with its residents.

"Everybody really enjoys participating in this and getting a chance to spend some time with veterans," said Lt. Robert Mark, public affairs officer for the 11th ACR, which trains military units from other parts of the country. "We were unfortunately unable to participate before Christmas, but we're happy to get it still in the holiday season and continue this tradition."

The Association of the United States Army's High Desert chapter, which is sponsoring the march, will use it as an opportunity to raise funds for the veterans, said Calvin Phillips, president of the High Desert AUSA chapter. Last year AUSA raised $4,000 for the Veterans Home.

The soldiers' yearly march began 14 years ago. At that time the soldiers would begin their journey at Fort Irwin, camp out and reach the Veterans Home the next day, covering a distance just shy of 40 miles, Phillips said. When Fort Irwin became a deployment center, the march was changed to a one-day event with the soldiers bussed to Barstow.

The march was much bigger when it was a two-day event. Because of that, next year the commanding officer for the 11th ACR has said the regiment will resume its two-day march from the National Training Center to the Veterans Home, Mark said.

"He felt the march warrants participation enough to dedicate that much time to it," he said. "So we're excited to do that again next year."

Once the soldiers begin marching up Veterans Parkway, most of the residents gather outside to greet them, said Denise Phillips, the home's standards compliance coordinator.

"They look forward to it because they have a common bond with what they used to do when they were in the military," she said. "They always enjoy it when we have active duty military come to visit the home."

The march begins at the Harvey House at 10 a.m. The Barstow Police Department will block motorist access to the First Street Bridge when the regiment crosses it and escort them to the Veterans Home.

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