

> RAO Bulletin Update

> 1 January 2008

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> == CA & Federal Disabled Benefits (60% SC) ----- (List)

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> NDAA 2008 UPDATE 12: An unfavorable development concerning the Fiscal Year 2008 Defense Authorization Bill has occurred at the 11th hour. The President's Deputy Press Secretary Scott Stanzel announced 28 DEC that the President intends to veto H.R. 1585, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2008 because a provision in the bill could make Iraqi assets held in U.S. banks vulnerable to lawsuits. Section 1083 - would significantly amend current law (the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act) in ways that would imperil Iraqi assets held in the United States, including reconstruction and central bank funds. If enacted, Section 1083 would permit plaintiffs' lawyers immediately to freeze Iraqi funds and would expose Iraq to massive liability in lawsuits concerning the misdeeds of the Saddam Hussein regime. The new democratic government of Iraq, during this crucial

period of reconstruction, cannot afford to have its funds entangled in such lawsuits in the United States. Once in place, the restrictions on Iraq's funds that could result from the bill could take months to lift, and thus Section 1083 cannot become law even for a short period of time.

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> If signed into law, the NDAA would have authorized a 3.5% percent across-the-board pay increase for active duty service members, rejected steep increases in Tricare fees and pharmacy co-payments, extended Combat Related Special Compensation to all combat-related disabled veterans and provided full Concurrent Receipt of Disability Pay for disabled retirees rated as Individually Unemployable by the VA. The bill would also lower the minimum Guard and Reserve retirement age by 90 days for every 3 months served on active duty and establish a Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance beginning 1 OCT 08. Each of these items (and many others) is now on hold as Congress and the Administration try to resolve the issue. According to the official White House statement, "As soon as possible upon Congress's return in JAN 08, the Administration will work with Congress to enact the NDAA adjusted in a manner that protects Iraqi funds in the United States and that ensures that the additional pay raise for our troops is retroactive to 1 JAN 081". The Senate and the House will be taking up the bill again once they reconvene after recess, around January 15th. The impending veto action is an unfortunate consequence of lawmakers incorrectly using the legislative process-in this case attaching an issue that has nothing to do with national defense to the NDAA. [Source: NAUS Special Report 28 Dec 07 ++]

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> VA COLA 2008: Millions of veterans and eligible family members will see their disability compensation, pension, and survivors' benefits increased as the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides an annual cost-of-living increase for key benefits. A recent law signed by President Bush provides a 2.3% increase in disability compensation and survivors' benefits. Eligible veterans and family members will see this increase starting in their January 2008 checks. Under the veterans' disability compensation program, tax-free payments will generally range from \$117 to \$2,527 per month depending on the degree of disability. Special payments up to \$7,232 per month apply to the most severely injured veterans. Pension disability benefits will also be increased by the same percentage and effective on the same date. The maximum annual rate for permanently and totally disabled veterans or veterans over age 65 can range from \$11,181 to \$18,654, based on household income and whether veterans are in need of help with activities for daily living. This increase also applies to survivors of veterans who died in service or from a service-connected disability. Dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC) survivors' benefit payments can range from \$1,091 to \$2,499 per month. Survivors of wartime veterans receiving death pension are also entitled to an increase. The maximum annual payment rate for a surviving spouse can range from \$7,498 to \$11,985. Benefits under this program are intended to bring an eligible spouse's income to a level

established by law. Under each benefit program, additional allowances may be payable for helpless, minor or school age children. For more information about VA benefits and services, refer to VA's website at [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)

<<http://www.va.gov>> or call

1-800-827-1000. [Source: VA News Release 31 Dec 07 ++]

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> IDENTITY THEFT UPDATE 09: Start the New Year right by taking the following precautions against loss of wallet, checkbook, etc.

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> 1. The next time you order checks have only your initials (instead of first

> name) and last name put on them. If someone takes your checkbook, they will not know if you sign your checks with just your initials or your first name, but your bank will know how you sign your checks.

> 2. Do not sign the back of your credit cards. Instead, put "PHOTO ID REQUIRED."

> 3. When you are writing checks to pay on your credit card accounts, DO NOT put the complete account number on the "For" line. Instead, just put the last four numbers. The credit card company knows the rest of the number, and anyone who might be handling your check as it passes through all the check-processing channels will not have access to it.

> 4. Put your work phone # on your checks instead of your home phone. If you have a PO Box, use that instead of your home address. If you do not have a PO Box, use your work address. Never have your SS# printed on your checks. You can add it if it is necessary. However, if you have it printed, anyone can get it.

> 5. Place the contents of your wallet on a photocopy machine. Do both sides of each license, credit card, etc. You will know what you had in your wallet and all of the account numbers and phone numbers to call and cancel. Keep the photocopy in a safe place. Also carry a photocopy of your passport when traveling either here or abroad.

> 6. When you check out of a hotel that uses cards for keys do not turn the "keys" in. Take them with you and destroy them. Those little cards have on them all of the information you gave the hotel, including address and credit card numbers and expiration dates. Someone with a card reader, or employee of the hotel, can access all that information with no problem whatsoever.

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> Some critical information to limit the damage in case you or someone you know has a

> Loss is:

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> - Cancel your credit cards immediately. The key is having the toll free numbers and your card numbers handy so you know whom to call. Keep those where you can find them.

> - File a police report immediately in the jurisdiction where your credit

cards, etc., were stolen. This proves to credit providers you were diligent, and this is a first step toward an investigation (if there ever is one). Perhaps most important action of all is to call the three national credit reporting organizations immediately to place a fraud alert on your name and Social Security number. The alert means any company that checks your credit knows your information was stolen, and they have to contact you by phone to authorize new credit. The numbers you always need to contact about your wallet and contents being stolen are:

- > a.) Equifax: 1-800-525-6285
- > b.) Experian (formerly TRW): 1-888-397-3742
- > c.) TransUnion: 1-800-680-7289
- > d.) Social Security Administration (fraud line): 1-800-269-0271
- > [Source: Various Dec 07++]

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> QVMB PROGRAM: The U.S. Senate unanimously passed legislation (S.2277) on 19 DEC to increase opportunities for veterans to purchase homes through the Qualified Veterans Mortgage Bond (QVMB) program. U.S. Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX), a member of the Armed Services Committee, pushed to secure provisions in the Defenders of Freedom Tax Relief Act that will open an existing low-interest housing loan program to all veterans, including those who served after 1977. The overall legislative package now moves to the U.S. House. Under current law, the Qualified Veterans Mortgage Bond (QVMB) program is only open to veterans who served on active duty prior to 1977. S.2277 would greatly expand the QVMB eligibility criteria for veterans who served in more recent conflicts by eliminating the pre-1977 requirement.

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> QVMB is a program to purchase certain mortgage loans to qualified veterans from lending institutions. The funds to be used for these purchases may be the proceeds of tax-exempt state-guaranteed, Qualified Veterans Mortgage Bonds. The program will thereby provide low interest single-family mortgage loans for permanent financing of owner-occupied homes including new and existing single-family residences and existing duplexes, triplexes and fourplexes. Eligible duplexes, triplexes and fourplexes must have been occupied as a multi-family dwelling for at least the preceding five years. These loans will reflect a low interest rate because they are subsidized by State appropriation and may be funded through the proceeds of tax exempt bonds. States presently eligible to participate in this program are Alaska, Oregon, California, Texas, and Wisconsin. Program requirements are:

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> . You must be a "qualified veteran" as that term is used in the Internal Revenue Code. A qualified veteran for purposes of this program includes specified veterans of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, Public Health Service, NOAA, the Coast and Geodetic Survey, and you must demonstrate that you are a qualified veteran by obtaining a certificate from the Veteran's Administration.

> . Although there are no limits on the acquisition cost of your residence,

you must be able to demonstrate that your residence will become your principal residence within a reasonable time after the financing is provided.

> . Residences which are likely to be used in a trade or business or as an investment property or recreational home do not qualify, and you will need to certify that your residence is not of these types.

> . You will need to certify that personal property which is not a fixture is not being financed.

> . Land underlying the residence may be financed only if it reasonably maintains the basic livability of the residence and does not provide other than incidentally a source of income to you.

> . The proceeds of the loan may not be used to acquire or replace an existing mortgage.

> . If you do qualify for and receive a low interest loan under this program, the loan will have to be paid in full at the time you sell or in any other way transfer your ownership interest in your house other than by loan assumption. This provision will be a condition of your Deed of Trust. This does not mean that you will not be able to sell your home, just that the new purchaser will have to obtain other financing or qualify to assume the loan.

> [Source: Senator Cornyn Press Release 20 DEC 07 ++]

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> AID & ATTENDANCE UPDATE 02: This Special Pension (part of the VA Improved Pension program) allows for Veterans and surviving spouses who require the regular attendance of another person to assist in eating, bathing, dressing, undressing or taking care of the needs of nature to receive additional monetary benefits. It also includes individuals who are blind or a patient in a nursing home because of mental or physical incapacity. Assisted care in an assisted living facility also qualifies. This most important benefit is overlooked by many families with Veterans or surviving spouses who need additional monies to help care for ailing parents or loved ones. This is a "pension benefit" and is not dependent upon service-related injuries for compensation. Most Veterans who are in need of assistance qualify for this pension. Aid and Attendance can help pay for care in the home, nursing home or assisted living facility. A Veteran is eligible for up to \$1,519 per month, while a surviving spouse is eligible for up to \$976 per month. A couple is eligible for up to \$1,801 per month. To be eligible the veteran must have served during one of the following periods:

> . World War II: December 7, 1941 through December 31, 1946

> . Korean War: June 27, 1950 through January 31, 1955

> . Vietnam War: August 5, 1964 (February 28, 1961, for veterans who served "in country" before August 5, 1964), through May 7, 1975

> . Gulf War: August 2, 1990, through a date to be set by law of Presidential Proclamation

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> The VA must determine that your net worth is such that it will probably

not support you through the remainder of your life. The VA does not include primary residence or vehicles when determining net worth. To qualify you must have a "countable income" of less than the pension amount to be eligible for all or a portion of the pension. Countable Income is the amount of income a veteran or surviving spouse receives each year, AFTER deducting all unreimbursed, recurring health care expenses. This includes assisted living costs, home health care, insurance & Medicare premiums, on-going pharmacy costs and more. If you have dependents, their health care costs can also be used to reduce your countable income. However, their income must also be added into the equation. There are three levels to the Improved Pension program: Basic Pension, Housebound, or Aid & Attendance. Each tier has its own level of benefits and qualifications. If you or your loved one does not qualify for Aid and Attendance, you may want to check to see if you qualify for another level of the Pension. For example the following would apply for eligibility to receive the Basic Pension:

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> . A veteran earns \$14,000 per year from Social Security. His wife earns \$9,000 per year. The veteran also earns \$5,000 per year from a small company pension giving the couple a total annual income of \$28,000.

> . The couple has \$38,000 in net worth in CDs and savings and they still live in the home they bought in 1954. This is not enough to support them for the rest of their lives...

> . The veteran pays \$1,800 per month for his wife's home health care, they each pay a monthly Medicare premium of \$93.50 (x 2 = \$187/mo), and he also pays \$149 per month for supplemental insurance. Thus, their total medical monthly expenses are \$25,632 per annum.

> . When you subtract the medical expenses from their total income, you get a "countable income" of only \$2,368. The maximum benefit amount of \$14,313 minus the countable income amount of \$2,368 equals \$11,945 which would be paid by the VA if the veteran applies for it...

> [Source: [www.veteranaid.org/](http://www.veteranaid.org/) <<http://www.veteranaid.org/>> Dec 07++]

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> **SSA DISABILITY CLAIM:** To help reduce the enormous waiting times for many disability benefit applicants to have their benefits approved, and to help reverse cuts in services to the public in Social Security Administration (SSA) field offices, U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA) announced on 21 DEC an additional \$363 million for the SSA to reduce the huge backlog in disability claims. The funding was included in the omnibus spending package passed by the Senate on 18 DEC. The House passed the bill on 19 DEC, and sent it to the President for his signature. "This funding is much needed and well deserved," said Cantwell. "The Northwest ranks second in the nation when it comes to waiting times for Social Security disability hearings. Delays mean that disabled residents in our region wait longer than almost everyone else to receive a decision on their benefits. In the meantime, most disabled applicants go without work and health insurance coverage as they attempt to navigate a rigorous application process. This program needs

support, and I will continue working to ensure the disability backlog is reduced." The Seattle Social Security Region, which includes Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Alaska, ranks second in the nation in Social Security disability hearing delays. The delays mean that disabled residents in the region wait an average of 584 days to get a decision regarding their eligibility for federal support. Advocates report that over half of claimants receive a favorable decision at Social Security disability hearings. As of DEC 2006, SSA had over 568,000 initial disability claims pending with an average processing time of 88 days. It also had nearly 718,000 Administrative Law Judge hearings (appeals) pending with an average delay time of 483 days. [Source: Senator Cantwell Press Release 21 Dec 07 ++]

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> PHILIPPINE DEERS REGISTRATION UPDATE 03: Effective 1 JAN 08 the DEERS/RAPIDS ID Card workstation located in the U.S. Embassy Manila at the Social Security and Veteran s Affairs section, Window 3, will be open on a first come, first served basis on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Applicants should go to Window 3 and ask for a number, you may then have a seat and wait to be called. All questions may be directed to (63) (2) 524-2227 on TUE and THUR between the hours of 08-1500. Calls placed outside of these days and times will not be entertained. Hours of operation are MON-WED-FRI Closed and TUE & THUR 08-1500. The workstation will be closed on all weekends and U.S. and Philippine federal holidays. The following personnel are eligible for DOD ID Cards:

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- > . Active duty members, retired members, and members of the Reserve components not on active duty in excess of 30 days.
- > . Retired Reserve members who have reached their 60th birthday.
- > . Family members of military sponsors on active duty for more than 30 consecutive days.
- > . Family members of Ready Reserve (Selected, Individual and Standby Reservists).
- > . Family members of Retired Reservists, who have qualified for retired pay at age 60, yet have not reached age 60.
- > . Un-remarried or unmarried former spouses previously enrolled in DEERS.
- > . Medal of Honor recipients and their eligible family members.
- > . One hundred percent Disabled American Veterans (DAVs) and their family members. Note that DAVs must have a combined rating of 100% to be eligible. DAVs receiving 100% because of unemployable status but whose combined rating falls below 100% are NOT eligible. No exceptions will be made.
- > . Former members having reached age 60 and in receipt of retired pay for non-regular service, and their family members.
- > Also eligible are survivors of the following:
  - > . Active duty & Retired with pay members.
  - > . Reserve members on active or inactive duty.
  - > . Retired reserve members who qualify for pay at age 60 but die before

reaching age 60.

> . Medal of Honor Recipients.

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> In order for dependents to receive an ID card the sponsor must be present, if not, the dependent must meet one of the following conditions:

> . The dependent must bring along an original DD Form 1172 signed by the sponsor and notarized from a DEERS/RAPIDS workstation validating them as a dependent, along with a valid national ID (such as a Filipina/US passport, driver s license, NBI report, voter s card, etc.), or

> . The dependent must bring along a valid Power of Attorney notarized by a US notary which gives her the power to act on the sponsor s behalf, along with a valid national ID as stated above, or

> . If the sponsor is deceased, the un-remarried spouse or unmarried former spouse may act on their own behalf.

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> It is advised that they should bring all original and/or certified copies of documentation that verifies their relationship with the sponsor such as marriage certificates, birth certificates, and previous DOD ID cards.

Photocopies will not be accepted. [Source: SPC Jeremy Babcock, JUSMAG - Philippines Dec 08 ++]

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> **MILITARY TAX RELIEF:** In the last month, the House and Senate have each twice passed HR 3997, the Defenders of Freedom Tax Relief Act of 2007 unanimously. The problem is that every time it passed, it was a slightly different version, and the House and Senate never passed the same one before Congress adjourned for the year. It's sad to say that Senate-vs.-House quibbling over a few final details derailed the whole bill, virtually on Christmas Eve. Hopefully they can reconcile their and pass the bill in the second session of the 110th Congress which convenes in late JAN. The bill calls for a range of tax relief for military members, their families and some small business employers of mobilized reservists. Among other things, it allows:

> . Disabled retirees who suffer delays in the VA claims process file for refunds of up to five years of back taxes (vs. three under current law).

> . Military widows to put their death gratuity amounts (now up to \$100,000) into tax-deferred IRA, and

> . Employers to make deposits in 401(k) s for employees who are deployed to combat zones.

> [Source: MOAA Leg Up 21 Dec 07 ++]

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> **MEDICARE REIMBURSEMENT RATES UPDATE 08:** All year long, members of Congress have known they'd have to do something by the end of the year to stop the 9.9% cut in Medicare and TRICARE payments to doctors scheduled to happen in JAN 08 if Congress didn't change the law. But they also knew that coming up with the money to pay for that fix was going to be a problem. They

thought they might cut payments to insurance companies that run Medicare HMOs and several other kinds of providers that some contend are over-reimbursed. But those potential groups all have their own lobbyists fighting to keep their profits from being reduced. By waiting until right before Christmas to approve a payment fix, Hill leaders thought that legislators anxious to get home for the holidays might be pressured into accepting a deal to stop the cuts for at least another year. But that strategy didn't work out very well. In football terms, the best Congress could do before adjourning for the year amounted to a 20-yard punt out of bounds. Instead of a 9.9% payment cut in January, Medicare and Tricare doctors will see a 1% increase - for 6 months. But if Congress doesn't find the money to extend the fix during the first half of next year (which won't be any easier in an election year than it was in 2007), an 11% payment cut will kick in on 1 JUL 08.

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> Kicking this political football out of bounds may not technically be a foul. But it's a huge potential penalty for military and Medicare beneficiaries who could find their doctors turning them away if Congress keeps flirting with these big payment cuts. AARP's director of government relations David Sloane said, "Enactment of this legislation does little to protect millions of Medicare beneficiaries from higher monthly premiums and only temporarily averts the problems beneficiaries would face finding a physician if payment cuts take place," said The AARP supported cutting rates for private insurers who provide health coverage through a program called Medicare Advantage. While most Democrats agreed with that approach, the Bush administration and many Republican lawmakers disagreed. Under the compromise, lawmakers would trim \$1.5 billion from a fund that would provide extra payments to certain insurers that entered previously unnerved regions. But that's a far cry from the \$50 billion cut that House Democrats passed earlier this year. [Source: MOAA Leg Up 21 Dec 07 ++]

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> VETERANS IN OFFICE UPDATE 01: The 110th session of Congress has the lowest percentage of veterans in the House and Senate since before World War II. And that number is expected to drop even further with 10 veterans planning to retire or run for other offices. After the Korean War, well over 70% of all members of the House and Senate were veterans. Now the number is 24% - 29 Senators and 100 House members have had some military experience. (In the 109th Congress the total number was 141). Only eight World War II vets are still serving: Sens. Daniel Akaka and Daniel Inouye, both D-Hawaii; Frank Lautenberg, D-N.J.; Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, and John Warner, R-Va.; and Reps John Dingell, D-Mich.; Ralph Hall, R-Texas, and Ralph Regula, R-Ohio. Warner and Regula will retire in 2009. [Source: TREA Washington Update 21 Dec 07 ++]

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> FLAG LEGISLATION UPDATE 02: U.S. Rep. Paul Broun has introduced a

resolution to allow families to ask honor guards to give the traditional "13 Fold" flag recitation at burial ceremonies in national cemeteries. Earlier this year, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, in response to a single complaint, temporarily banned the 13 Fold recitations. The complaint objected to the phrases "God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" and "God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost" in the recitation. Veterans Affairs later allowed the recitation, but only if a grieving family specifically requested it, said Broun, R-Athens. The legislation, H.R. 4781, would ban honor guards from participating in the funeral of any veteran interred in a national cemetery unless the veteran's family is told about the option of having the honor guard perform the traditional recitation. These meanings, not part of the U.S. Flag Code, have been ascribed to the 13 folds of American flags at veteran's burial services:

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> 1. Symbol of life.

> 2. Symbol of our belief in the eternal life.

> 3. In honor and remembrance of the veteran departing our ranks who gave a portion of life for the defense of our country to attain a peace throughout the world.

> 4. Represents our weaker nature, for as American citizens trusting in God, it is to Him we turn in times of peace as well as in times of war for His divine guidance.

> 5. A tribute to our country, for in the words of Stephen Decatur, "Our country, in dealing with other countries, may she always be right; but it is still our country, right or wrong."

> 6. Represents where our hearts lie. It is with our heart that we pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

> 7. A tribute to our armed forces.

> 8. A tribute to the one who entered in to the valley of the shadow of death, that we might see the light of day, and to honor mother, for whom it flies on Mother's Day.

> 9. A tribute to womanhood.

> 10. A tribute to father.

> 11. In the eyes of a Hebrew citizen, represents the lower portion of the seal of King David and King Solomon, and glorifies, in their eyes, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

> 12. In the eyes of a Christian citizen, represents an emblem of eternity and glorifies, in their eyes, God the Father, the Son, and Holy Ghost.

> 13. When the flag is completely folded, the stars are uppermost, reminding us of our national motto, "In God We Trust."

> [Source: Athens Banner-Herald article 21 Dec 07 ++]

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> VA FRAUD UPDATE 05: Three executives from an assisted-living facility in

Loudon TN were indicted on charges of stealing veterans benefits from a resident, the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI) said on 19 DEC. The former owners of Mountain View Assisted Living Facility, Ronnie Costner, 68, and Lynn Costner, 57, each were indicted on one count of theft of property between \$10,000 and \$60,000, as was former administrator Curtis Sorells, 41. The investigation began in 2003 after complaints about "abuse of patient fund," a TBI press release states. TBI spokeswoman Kristin Helm said the victim, a man, no longer lived at the facility but that no one notified the Veterans Administration, so the suspects kept receiving his benefits. The suspects were booked into the Loudon County jail and released on bond. [Source: Knoxville News State Briefs 20 Dec 07 ++]

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> TRICARE USER FEES UPDATE 20: The DoD Task Force on the Future of Military Health Care released its final report on 20 DEC and the results were pretty much as expected. The report said the relatively low health fees paid by military retirees vs. the growing cost of military health benefits are out of step with overall trends in the U.S. health care system and unfair to the U.S. taxpayer. The task force, co-chaired by Gen. John D.W. Corley, USAF, Commander of Air Combat Command, and economist Dr. Gail Wilensky, recommended retiree fee increases that were patterned generally after those recommended by DoD for the past two years. Under the task force's plan:

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> . Retirees under 65 would be restricted from shifting between using TRICARE Prime, the managed care program, and Tricare Standard except during designated annual open seasons.

> . Fees would be stratified in three tiers, based on the amount of the member's military retired pay. Most retired officers with families covered under Tricare Prime would pay an annual enrollment fee of \$780 for 2008, with the fee rising steeply to \$1,800 a year by 2011.

> . Those in Tricare Standard would end up paying about \$1,100 a year in enrollment fees and deductibles by 2011.

> . Medicare-eligibles (i.e. TFL users) would have to pay an annual enrollment fee of \$120 per year by 2011.

> . Any beneficiary who didn't pay the enrollment fee also wouldn't be allowed to use military pharmacies.

> . As for pharmacy coverage, the task force recommended raising copayments for retail pharmacy use from the current \$3 (generic), \$9 (brand-name formulary), and \$22 (non-formulary) to \$15, \$25, and \$45, respectively - significantly greater increases than previously proposed by the Pentagon.

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> Recommendations from the Task Force on the Future of Military Medical Care are surprising only in that the large increases could be phased in over four or five years in an effort to cushion the blow. A \$10 monthly fee for Tricare for Life is also recommended, an amount the task force admits has no direct bearing on the Pentagon's expenses for providing medical care. The

Defense Department has been trying for several years to increase Tricare enrollment fees, co-payments and deductibles, as well as co-payments for using retail pharmacies, but has been blocked by Congress. The 2008 defense authorization bill passed by Congress last week included a one-year prohibition on fee increases. President Bush was expected to sign that bill before the end of the year. The ban would not prevent the Bush administration from including the fee increases in its 2009 defense budget request. In its final report, delivered to Defense Secretary Robert Gates on 20 DEC, the task force said, "Americans everywhere are paying high costs for health care. While military retirees deserve a more generous benefit because of their sacrifices and years of service, relatively modest increases in out-of-pocket costs will not only help stabilize the system and make it more accountable but will also be looked upon as being appropriate by the American taxpayer." Medical care costs are becoming a huge part of the annual defense budget. In 2001, medical costs were \$19 billion, but in 2007, the defense health care budget was more than \$39 billion. The fastest-growing part of the health budget is pharmacy costs, where spending quadrupled between 2000 and 2007, the report said. [Source: Navy Times Rick Maze article 21Dec 07 ++]

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> VA VISION CARE UPDATE 01: U.S. Senator Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI), Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, noted with gratitude Senate action approving a House amendment to H.R. 797, the Dr. James Allen Veteran Vision Equity Act of 2007. Last month, the Senate passed a modified version of H.R. 797, which was introduced by Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin (D-WI). On 17 DEC, the Senate concurred with the subsequent House amendment, paving the way for the bill to be sent to the President's desk for signature. "This bill will allow veterans who are legally blind to receive compensation that VA's current strict eligibility requirements preclude them from receiving," said Senator Akaka. Akaka is the author of S.1163, a companion bill to H.R.797. The House bill as amended would alter the vision impairment standard for two groups of veterans: those with service-connected blindness in one eye who later lose vision in the other eye, and those who receive special compensation for multiple disabilities that include vision impairment. The bill also provides important improvements to certain burial and memorial benefits that govern how fallen veterans are honored. It:

> . Authorizes financial assistance from VA to state veterans' cemeteries.

> . Eliminates the time limitation for states filing for reimbursement for interment costs.

> . Makes permanent the authority for VA to furnish government headstones and markers for veterans buried in private cemeteries.

> . Directs VA to design and make available an appropriate marker to denote the veterans' status of those interred in private cemeteries, as an alternative to a government furnished headstone.

> [Source: Senator Akaka Press Release 18 Dec 07 ++]

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> HP/STAPLES LAWSUIT: A Boston man has filed a class-action lawsuit accusing hardware maker HP (Hewett Packard) and office supply retailer Staples of colluding to inflate the price of printer ink cartridges in violation of federal antitrust law. According to the suit, HP allegedly paid Staples \$100 million to refrain from selling inexpensive third-party ink cartridges, although the suit doesn't make it clear how plaintiff Ranjit Bedi arrived at that figure. For most printer companies, ink is the bread and butter of their business. The price of ink for HP ink-jet printers can be as much as \$8000 per gallon for their superior quality photo printer ink. HP is currently the dominant company in the printing market, and a considerable portion of the company's profits come from ink. The printer makers have been waging an all-out war against third-party vendors that sell replacement cartridges at a fraction of the price. The tactics employed by the printer makers to maintain monopoly control over ink distribution for their printing products have become increasingly aggressive. In the past, we have seen HP, Epson, Lenovo and other companies attempt to use patents and even the Digital Millennium Copyright Act in their efforts to crush third party ink distributors. The companies have also turned to the use of microchips embedded in ink cartridges that work with a corresponding technical mechanism in the printer that blocks the use of unauthorized third-party ink. Adding insult to injury most printers misreport that they are low on ink when they are not. A new study says that on average, more than half of the ink from inkjet cartridges is wasted when users toss them in the garbage. Bedi's suit asks for unspecified damages and an injunction barring the two companies from engaging in anticompetitive business practices. [Source: <http://arstechnica.com/index.ars> Ryan Paul article 18 Dec 07 ++]

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> VA LAWSUIT (LACK OF CARE) UPDATE 01: The government asked a San Francisco

federal judge on Friday to dismiss a high-profile lawsuit challenging the system of treatment and benefits for returning combat veterans. The government's lawyers argued that civil courts have no authority over the Department of Veterans Affairs' medical decisions or how it handles grievances and claims. "If plaintiffs are not happy with the way the system is currently working, their remedy is to take it up with Congress" or with the veterans department, Justice Department attorney Daniel Bensing told U.S. District Judge Samuel Conti. He said that in 1988, Congress created a system of reviewing veterans' claims and it can't be second-guessed by regular courts. It was the first hearing on the nationwide lawsuit that is being closely watched by veterans, their families and advocacy groups. The suit seeks a judicial finding that the VA's system of handling claims and appeals violates veterans' rights. The plaintiffs also want court orders requiring the department to provide immediate medical and psychological help to returning troops and to screen them for risk of stress disorders and

suicide.

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> Gordon Erspamer, a lawyer for veterans' advocates, argued that the system established under the 1988 law is rife with constitutional violations that federal courts are competent to judge. Wounded veterans, he said, are arbitrarily denied care and benefits, are forced to wait months for vital treatment and years for benefits, have no access to lawyers or potential witnesses, and have little recourse when their claims are rejected. Under the current procedures, Erspamer said, the government "can deny health care to veterans coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan with impunity. ... If this court dismisses this case, there is no way that these claims will ever be adjudicated." Conti, a World War II veteran and a judicial conservative during his 37 years on the bench, raised questions about the courts' authority over the dispute but did not say how he would rule on the government's dismissal motion.

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> The suit was filed in July by two organizations - Veterans for Common Sense and Veterans United for Truth - as a proposed class action on behalf of 320,000 to 800,000 veterans, or their survivors, claiming service-connected deaths and disabilities. They focused on claims of post-traumatic stress disorder, increasingly common among returning troops. A Pentagon study group reported in June that about 84,000 veterans, more than one-third of those who sought care from the VA from 2002 through 2006 had been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress or another mental disorder. The Pentagon group also found that the system was understaffed, prompting the VA to announce staffing increases in July. The suit said the department has a backlog of more than 600,000 disability claims. Veterans' advocates say the VA pressures stressed-out soldiers to acknowledge pre-existing "personality disorders" that gain them a speedy discharge while forfeiting future disability benefits. Erspamer said improper delays and denials of treatment and benefits have contributed to an epidemic of suicides.

[Source: San Francisco Chronicle Bob Egelko ([begeko@sfchronicle.com](mailto:begeko@sfchronicle.com))  
(<mailto:begeko@sfchronicle.com>)

article 15 Dec 07 ++]

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> HOSPICE CARE UPDATE 01: Hospice care helps terminally ill patients prepare for death, treating their symptoms and pain and preparing them -- and their families -- for the end. The patients maintain their dignity and some semblance of control over their life. Their families receive counseling to help them come to terms with their impending loss. It's humane. It's caring. It's thoughtful. Why, then, do so few Americans chose to receive hospice care, even though Medicare covers the expense? A study published in July in the New England Journal of Medicine found that only one-third of Americans die under the care of hospice, despite hospice being essentially free of charge. And those who avail themselves of hospice care often aren't getting the full benefit of it, said Dr. Donald Schumacher, president and

CEO of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, the world's oldest and largest nonprofit membership organization devoted exclusively to promoting access to hospices. "They hold off the ultimate decision until they finally have to face it," Schumacher said. "And when we speak to families, the question we hear over and over again, is, 'Why didn't we come into hospice sooner?' "

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> There currently are more than 3,500 hospices in the United States, and more are being built every year, Schumacher said. "Approximately 500 new hospice licenses were issued over the past two years," he said.

> Hospice care is end-of-life care provided by health professionals and volunteers. The hospice plan provides medical, psychological and spiritual support, the goal of which is to help people who are dying experience peace, comfort and dignity. Caregivers control pain and other symptoms as much as possible, so a person can remain as alert and comfortable as possible. But hospice also focuses on the family members as well, helping them deal with the reality of death, said Carol Spence, director of research for the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization. "We outright make the patient's family our unit of care, so there's a lot of attention given to the family caregivers, including bereavement care following the death of the patient," she said. Usually, patients are given hospice care when they are expected to live six months or less. Hospice care can take place at their home or in a hospice center. Seeing the value of the care, hospitals and nursing facilities also are opening hospice units to help the dying.

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> Part of the difficulty in choosing to use a hospice can be how hard it is to really know how much time a person has left, Spence said. "It's difficult in general to come up with an accurate picture of disease projections," Spence said. "People are living with chronic illnesses that will have an inevitable downward course, but knowing precisely when death will approach is not an easy thing." Bringing hospice in doesn't mean they're going to die tomorrow. It means a better quality of life for whatever amount of time you have left, whether it's a week or a month or six months. Another possible reason for people failing to use hospice can be found in American attitudes toward dying -- going to hospice can seem the equivalent of failing forgiving up. Our American culture is death-averse. The medical community and the general population, the attitude is shown in the metaphors used, whatever the disease you have -- 'I'm going to fight it, I'm going to beat it.' "

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> There's also some misunderstanding over who can utilize hospice care, with many people believing it's mainly for those dying of cancer. In fact, about 40% of U.S. hospice admissions are for patients suffering from some other life-ending disease, such as end-stage heart disease, dementia, lung disease or stroke, according to the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization. The misunderstandings also involve the cost of care. Many people believe hospice is too expensive or out of their price range, even

though Medicare or private insurance covers the full cost of hospice care. Despite all this, the number of hospices and the number of people turning to them are expected to grow as baby boomers enter retirement age and begin facing their own mortality, said Schumacher, a member of that generation himself. To learn more, refer to the NHPCO website <http://www.nhpc.org/templates/1/homepage.cfm>. [Source: HealthDay News Dennis Thompson article 16 Dec 07 ++]

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> RETIREE ASSET STRATEGY SURVEY: A new survey shows that retirees, highly concerned about running out of financial assets, may be overly focused on preserving their savings principal and needlessly reducing their quality of life. The survey, commissioned by AARP and the American Council of Life Insurers (ACLI), examined the retirement finance strategies of retirees age 60 to 75 with assets of at least \$50,000, not including their homes. The survey found that 75% of those interviewed are concentrating on either building or maintaining their "savings and investment principal." This suggests that retirees may be sacrificing their present finances as a long-term management strategy. Only about 23% have allowed themselves to dip into principal in the last year, the AARP-ACLI study showed. Plans to curtail spending may be a long-term strategy for many retirees given the fact that 64% of those interviewed said that they would cut back on their spending if the value of [their] investments went down by five percent. "Many retirees may be able to improve the quality of their lives without risking their nest egg," said Jean Setzfand, Director of Economic Issues Agenda at AARP. She noted that while retirees should protect enough savings to allow for things like the skyrocketing costs of health care and a longer life expectancy, it is important to determine whether you can use your money to make retirement more enjoyable. "A guaranteed income product would substantially improve the peace of mind of many retirees," said Walter Welsh, ACLI Executive Vice President, in referring to study findings that 49% think such an investment would add to their peace of mind. The report also identified five different management styles to describe how the retirees handled their finances, pointing to those two described as thrifty and undisciplined as the most interested in a guaranteed lifetime income strategy. For more information on this report, refer to [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org) or <http://www.aarp.org> or [www.acli.com](http://www.acli.com) <http://www.acli.com>. [Source: AARP Policy & Research article 10 Dec 07 ++]

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> THUNDERBIRDS 2008 SHOW SCHEDULE: The Air Force Thunderbirds have released their performance schedule for 2008, their 55th anniversary year. The Thunderbirds are the official Air Force Air Demonstration Squadron. The unit consists of eight pilots (including six demonstration pilots), four support officers, four civilians and about 110 enlisted airmen. The lead pilot this

year is Lt. Col. Greg Thomas. The other demonstration pilots are: Maj. Chris Austin, Thunderbird No. 2, left wing; Maj. Scott Poteet, Thunderbird No. 4, slot; Maj. Samantha Weeks, Thunderbird No. 5; and Maj. Tyrone Douglas, Thunderbird No. 6, opposing solo. Weeks is the first-ever female Thunderbird, and is in her second year with the squadron. The 2008 schedule is as follows:

> MARCH

- > 15 - San Angelo, Texas
- > 29 - Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla.

> APRIL

- > 5 and 6 - Punta Gorda, Fla.
- > 12 and 13 - Lakeland, Fla.
- > 19 and 20 - Wilmington, N.C.
- > 26 - Charleston Air Force Base, S.C.

> MAY

- > 3 and 4 - March ARB, Calif.
- > 10 and 11 - Langley Air Force Base, Va.
- > 17 and 18 - Fort Smith, Ark.
- > 24 - Tinker Air Force Base, Okla.
- > 28 - U.S. Air Force Academy, Colo. (Invitation Only)
- > 31 - McGuire Air Force Base, N.J.

> JUNE

- > 1 - McGuire Air Force Base, N.J.
- > 7 and 8 - Rockford, Ill .
- > 14 and 15 - Quebec City
- > 21 - Klamath Falls, Ore.
- > 24 - Eielson Air Force Base, Ala.
- > 28 and 29 - Elmendorf Air Force Base, Ala.

> JULY

- > 4 and 6 - Battle Creek, Mich.
- > 12 and 13 - Milwaukee, Wis.
- > 19 and 20 - McChord Air Force Base, Wash.
- > 23 - Cheyenne, Wyo.
- > 26 and 27 - Rochester, N.Y.

> AUGUST

- > 8 and 10 - Abbotsford, Canada
- > 16 and 17 - Offutt Air Force Base, Neb.
- > 20 - Atlantic City, N.J.
- > 23 and 24 - Kansas City, Mo.
- > 30 and 31 - Travis Air Force Base, Calif.

> SEPTEMBER

- > 6 and 7 - Westover ARB, Mass.
- > 12 and 13 - Reno, Nev.
- > 14 - Mountain Home, Idaho
- > 20 and 21 - Scott Air Force Base, Ill
- > 27 and 28 - Salinas, Calif

> OCTOBER

- > 4 - Vance Air Force Base, Okla.
- > 11 and 12 - Ft. Worth, Texas
- > 18 and 19 - Dobbins Air Force Base, Ga.
- > 25 and 26 - Houston, Texas

> NOVEMBER

- > 1 and 2 - Lafayette, La.
- > 8 and 9 - Nellis Air Force Base, Nev.
- > [Source: Air Force Times article 17 Dec 07 ++]

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> SOUTH CAROLINA VET CEMETERY: According to Philip Butler, director of the State Office of Veteran Affairs. South Carolina has opened the M.J. "Dolly" Cooper Veterans Cemetery in Anderson for men and women who've honorably served their nation. The site adjacent to the Richard Campbell State Veterans Nursing Home on the Belton Highway is the first state veterans cemetery. Residents have been so anxious to have a veterans cemetery in the northwestern region of the state that a number of burials were scheduled even as the site was opening, Butler said. Other ceremonies are scheduled for later this month, as well as January and February, said Phyllis Brown, administrative assistant at the cemetery. At least 120 veterans have come by to make sure they have the proper paperwork on file to have their remains laid to rest at the site, she said in a telephone interview. Veterans, their spouses or family members must have records to prove the veteran served in the military and was honorably discharged. To be buried at the Anderson site, they also must show some type of residency in South Carolina. For example, a veteran must have lived in the state at the time of entering the military, at the time of discharge or lived in the state for a 20-year period, Brown said. "Sometimes that can be difficult to verify, so it is helpful to begin the search (for records) early," she said. Veterans also may indicate in advance what they would like to have inscribed on their granite headstones in addition to the required information such as name, branch of service and dates of birth and death, she said. Local funeral home directors also can be helpful in assisting veterans and their families should they care to prepare in advance, she said.

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> The first section opened at the Anderson cemetery is 27 acres of rolling hills with room for 6,800 casket grave sites, 740 in-ground cremation burial sites and a scattering area for cremated remains located near a flag memorial site. In the next three months, 800 columbarium niches will be open for cremated remains. South Carolina received a \$5,183,850 grant from the federal government to build the 57 acre site, and the state will pay to maintain it. Formal opening ceremonies will be held in the spring. There are two national veterans cemeteries in South Carolina. One in Florence and another in Beaufort but the space is limited. A third national veterans cemetery will be built on the northern edge of Fort Jackson near Columbia and is expected to begin burials at the end of 2008. About 413,000 veterans are estimated to be living in the state. Information on VA burial

benefits can be obtained from national cemetery offices, from the VA Web site on the Internet at <http://www.cem.va.gov> or by calling VA regional offices toll-free at (800) 827-1000. Information about the South Carolina veterans cemetery can be obtained from the Governor's Office of Veterans Affairs at (803) 734-0200 or by contacting the Cemetery Superintendent Mr. Larry Montandon directly at 140 Inway Drive Anderson, SC 29621 Tel: (864) 332-8022. For additional info refer to <http://www.govoep.state.sc.us/va/EligibilityFacts.pdf>. [Source: [www.snow.com](http://www.snow.com) <http://www.snow.com> Susanne M. Schafer article 17 Dec 07 ++]

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> VA SECRETARY UPDATE 06: The Senate Veterans Affairs Committee endorsed James Peake's nomination unanimously as Veterans Affairs secretary and the Senate then confirmed him by unanimous consent. In a ceremony on 20 DEC he was sworn in by President George W. Bush as the nation's sixth Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Retired Lt. Gen. Peake, 63, the son of a medical services officer and Army nurse, has spent 40 years in military medicine. He retired from the Army in 2004 after being lead commander in several medical posts, including four years as Army Surgeon General. President Bush said one of Peake's first tasks would be to continue to implement recommendations of the presidential commission on veterans care chaired by former Sen. Bob Dole, R-Kan., and former Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala. The recommendations include aggressively treating post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury, streamlining VA processes and strengthening support for families. Peake's "decades of expertise in combat medicine and health care management have provided him with a thorough understanding of the department's responsibility to care for America's veterans," Bush said in a statement. Widely supported by both Democrats and Republicans, Peake has promised lawmakers that he would be an independent advocate for veterans and get needed funding for their care.

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> Former Veterans Affairs Secretary James Nicholson stepped down 1 OCT 07. Gordon Mansfield, the VA's deputy secretary has been serving as acting secretary. The favorable Senate vote came after Peake assured lawmakers that he would learn from past VA mistakes by placing more medical staff at VA clinics and budgeting better to meet the agency's needs. He also promised to find other ways to retain senior VA officials than awarding lucrative performance bonuses each year regardless of merit. "I believe General Peake's heart is in the right place, but this job will take more than just promises," said Sen. Patty Murray, (D-WA)., a member of the Senate panel. "He needs to work everyday to overcome the bureaucratic ineptitude, backlog of claims, wait times, and other challenges that our veterans face every day." More than 5.5 million veterans are expected to receive care this year in VA's 153 hospitals and 900 clinics. VA also provides disability compensation and pensions to 3.5 million veterans and family members, and operates 125 national cemeteries. [Source: AP article 16 Dec 07 ++]

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> CALIFORNIA & FEDERAL DISABLED BENEFITS (40% SC): Veterans who are residents of California who are rated 40% overall disabled by the VA as a result of a service connected (SC) determination are entitled to the following state and federal benefits. This list was last updated OCT 06. For residents of other states the federal benefits are the same but the state benefits will be in accordance with that state's laws. To determine what they are check the VA website associated with the state in question:

>

- > 1. Eligibility for additional allowance for dependents-spouse, children, dependent parent(s).
- > 2. Eligibility for additional aid and attendance allowance for disabled spouse.
- > 3. VA fee basis outpatient medical card for SC condition(s) requiring treatment.
- > 4. Enrollment in VA Healthcare Priority Group 2 (no healthcare co-payments required; pharmacy co-payments required for NSC medications, except for former POWs).
- > 5. Eligibility for sensorineural aids-hearing aids, eyeglasses, contact lenses-without regard to whether the condition producing need for such is service-connected.
- > 6. Eligibility for Service-Disabled Veterans' Life Insurance (RH).
- > 7. Possible eligibility for special monthly compensation for loss or loss of use of a creative organ; loss of a female breast; or, loss or loss of use of one foot or one eye.
- > 8. Possible eligibility for payment of annual clothing allowance for specified SC disorders resulting in need for prosthetic appliance or use of a wheelchair, or for certain skin conditions.
- > 9. Possible eligibility for one-time assistance in purchase of specially-adapted automobile.
- > 10. Possible eligibility for Automobile Adaptive Equipment Allowance.
- > 11. Eligibility for education or training under VA Vocational Rehabilitation.
- > 12. Golden Access Passport for U.S. National Parks.
- > 13. Eligibility for 10-point preference for Federal Civil Service employment. Under certain circumstances, may be employed on a noncompetitive basis.
- > 14. Eligibility for 15-point preference for State of California employment.
- > 15. Home loan guaranty funding fee exemption.
- > 16. Possible eligibility for Home Improvement and Structural Alteration (HISA) home modification grant.
- > 17. Eligibility for CAL-VET College Tuition and Fee Waiver for children (Plan B).
- > 18. Possible eligibility for DMV Disabled Person Parking Placard.
- > 19. If a 20-year military retiree, possible eligibility for CRSC.
- > 20. Possible eligibility for the California Disabled Veteran Business

Enterprise (DVBE) and the Federal Service Disabled Veteran Owned Business (SDVOB) programs.

> [Source: CA Dept of VA website Nov 07 ++]

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> CALIFORNIA & FEDERAL DISABLED BENEFITS (50% SC): Veterans who are residents of California who are rated 50% overall disabled by the VA as a result of a service connected (SC) determination are entitled to the following state and federal benefits. This list was last updated OCT 06. For residents of other states the federal benefits are the same but the state benefits will be in accordance with that state's laws. To determine what they are check the VA website associated with the state in question:

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> 1. Eligibility for additional allowance for dependents-spouse, children, dependent parent(s).

> 2. Eligibility for additional aid and attendance allowance for disabled spouse.

> 3. VA fee basis outpatient medical card (all conditions requiring treatment, whether SC or not, except dental).

> 4. Enrollment in VA Healthcare Priority Group 1 (no co-payments required).

> 5. Eligibility for sensorineural aids-hearing aids, eyeglasses, contact lenses-without regard to whether the condition producing need for such is service-connected.

> 6. Eligibility for Service-Disabled Veterans' Insurance (RH).

> 7. Possible eligibility for special monthly compensation for loss or loss of use of a creative organ; loss of a female breast; or, loss or loss of use of one foot or one eye.

> 8. Possible eligibility for payment of annual clothing allowance for specified SC disorders resulting in need for prosthetic appliance or use of a wheelchair, or for certain skin conditions.

> 9. Possible eligibility for one-time assistance in purchase of specially-adapted automobile.

> 10. Possible eligibility for Automobile Adaptive Equipment Allowance.

> 11. Eligibility for education or training under VA Vocational Rehabilitation.

> 12. Golden Access Passport for U.S. National Parks.

> 13. California State Park pass (requires SC wartime-incurred disability) (\$3.50 one-time fee). Entitles the holder to the use of all basic State Park System operated facilities at no further charge. Not valid at units operated by local government, private agencies or concessionaires."

> 14. Reduced fee for hunting license.

> 15. Reduced fee for basic sport fishing license.

> 16. Eligibility for 10-point preference for Federal Civil Service employment. Under certain circumstances, may be employed on a noncompetitive basis.

> 17. Eligibility for 15-point preference for State of California employment.

- > 18. Home loan guaranty funding fee exemption.
- > 19. Possible eligibility for Home Improvement and Structural Alteration (HISA) home modification grant.
- > 20. Eligibility for CAL-VET College Tuition and Fee Waiver for children (Plan B).
- > 21. Possible eligibility for DMV Disabled Person Parking Placard.
- > 22. If a 20-year military retiree, possible eligibility for CDRP or CRSC.
- > [Source: CA Dept of VA website Nov 07 ++]
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- > CALIFORNIA & FEDERAL DISABLED BENEFITS (60% SC): Veterans who are residents of California who are rated 60% overall disabled by the VA as a result of a service connected (SC) determination are entitled to the following state and federal benefits. This list was last updated OCT 06. For residents of other states the federal benefits are the same but the state benefits will be in accordance with that state's laws. To determine what they are check the VA website associated with the state in question:
- >
- > 1. Eligibility for a rating of total disability because of individual unemployability.
- > 2. Eligibility for additional allowance for dependents-spouse, children, dependent parent(s).
- > 3. Eligibility for additional aid and attendance allowance for disabled spouse.
- > 4. VA fee basis outpatient medical card (all conditions requiring treatment, whether SC or not, except dental).
- > 5. Enrollment in VA Healthcare Priority Group 1 (no co-payments required).
- > 6. Eligibility for sensorineural aids-hearing aids, eyeglasses, contact lenses-without regard to whether the condition producing need for such is service-connected.
- > 7. Eligibility for Service-Disabled Veterans' Insurance (RH).
- > 8. Possible eligibility for special monthly compensation for loss or loss of use of a creative organ; loss of a female breast; or, loss or loss of use of one hand, one foot, or one eye.
- > 9. Possible eligibility for payment of annual clothing allowance for specified SC disorders resulting in need for prosthetic appliance or use of a wheelchair, or for certain skin conditions.
- > 10. Possible eligibility for one-time assistance in purchase of specially-adapted automobile.
- > 11. Possible eligibility for Automobile Adaptive Equipment Allowance.
- > 12. Eligibility for education or training under VA Vocational Rehabilitation.
- > 13. Golden Access Passport for U.S. National Parks.
- > 14. California State Park pass (requires SC wartime-incurred disability) (\$3.50 one-time fee). Entitles the holder to the use of all basic State Park System operated facilities at no further charge. Not valid at units operated by local government, private agencies or concessionaires.

- > 15. Reduced fee for hunting license.
- > 16. Reduced fee for basic sport fishing license.
- > 17. Eligibility for 10-point preference for Federal Civil Service employment. Under certain circumstances, may be employed on a noncompetitive basis.
- > 18. Eligibility for 15-point preference for State of California employment.
- > 19. Home loan guaranty funding fee exemption.
- > 20. Possible eligibility for Home Improvement and Structural Alteration (HISA) home modification grant.
- > 21. Eligibility for CAL-VET College Tuition and Fee Waiver for children (Plan B).
- > 22. Possible eligibility for DMV Disabled Person Parking Placard.
- > 23. If a 20-year military retiree, possible eligibility for CDRP or CRSC.
- > 24. Possible eligibility for the California Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise (DVBE) and the Federal Service Disabled Veteran Owned Business (SDVOB) programs.
- > [Source: CA Dept of VA website Nov 07 ++]
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> VETERAN LEGISLATION STATUS 29 DEC 07: After completing work 19 DEC, the House and Senate officially recessed until the New Year. (Technically, only the House adjourned; the Senate is keeping pro forma sessions to stop the President from making any recess appointments.) Although some pro forma sessions are scheduled, the full House does not return until 15 JAN, while the Senate will reconvene 22 JAN 08. For a listing of Congressional bills of interest to the veteran community that have been introduced in the 110th Congress refer to the Bulletin's House & Senate attachments. By clicking on the bill number indicated you can access the actual legislative language of the bill and see if your representative has signed on as a cosponsor. Support of these bills through cosponsorship by other legislators is critical if they are ever going to move through the legislative process for a floor vote to become law. A good indication on that likelihood is the number of cosponsors who have signed onto the bill. A cosponsor is a member of Congress who has joined one or more other members in his/her chamber (i.e. House or Senate) to sponsor a bill or amendment. The member who introduces the bill is considered the sponsor. Members subsequently signing on are called cosponsors. Any number of members may cosponsor a bill in the House or Senate. At <http://thomas.loc.gov> you can also review a copy of each bill's content, determine its current status, the committee it has been assigned to, and if your legislator is a sponsor or cosponsor of it. To determine what bills, amendments your representative has sponsored, cosponsored, or dropped sponsorship on refer to <http://thomas.loc.gov/bss/d110/sponlst.html>. The key to increasing cosponsorship on veteran related bills and subsequent passage into law is letting our representatives know of veteran's feelings on issues. At the end of some listed bills is a web link that can be used to do that.

Otherwise, you can locate on <http://thomas.loc.gov> who your representative is and his/her phone number, mailing address, or email/website to communicate with a message or letter of your own making. [Source: RAO Bulletin Attachment 13 Dec 07 ++]

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