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FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS



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## **News of the Week**

### ***VA Chief Outlines Panel's Recommendations on Services for Wounded Vets***

By Donna Miles

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, May 9 – There's a new era of cooperation within the federal government to work together to provide services for troops returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan, Veterans Affairs Secretary Jim Nicholson told the House Veterans Affairs Committee.

Nicholson reported on recommendations of the Interagency Task Force on Returning War on Terror Heroes. President Bush formed the group in early March, following revelations about problems at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, to assess federal services and benefits for returning combat troops.

The chairman gave the task force, chaired by Nicholson, 45 days to review federal benefits and processes to identify gaps in services that could be filled quickly without the need for additional legislative authority or funding.

The goal, Nicholson said, was to find ways to immediately improve services for returning troops and to better reach out to them and their families to make them aware of services available to them.

"So all in all, our focus is really very simple," Nicholson told the committee. "It is to make the existing services that are there in the federal government the very best they can be for our veterans and for their families and for the survivors of those who paid the ultimate price."

Nicholson reported the group's 25 recommendations to President Bush. In his testimony, he highlighted some of the most significant ones.

These include new cooperative arrangements between the VA and Defense Department to improve wounded troops' transition between the two departments' systems, he said. Among new initiatives are:

-- A new joint process to be developed to provide more consistent and faster processing of disability determinations.

-- Screening of all global war on terror veterans who seek VA support for any form of brain injury resulting from concussive blasts or other combat conditions. "We want to identify it as early as possible and begin treatment," Nicholson said.

-- A simpler enrollment process - both online and in person - to enroll for health care services and benefits.

-- Continued development of what Nicholson calls VA's "world standard" in electronic medical records.

-- More action within the Defense Department to increase attendance at Transition Assistance Program briefings to better educate veterans about their benefits. "The more our veterans understand about their benefits, the more successful their transition to civilian life will become," Nicholson said.

Other U.S. government agencies will collaborate to provide additional or more complete services, Nicholson said. For examples of these collaborative efforts and the remainder of this article, click <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=45963>.

## ***Legislation Improving Wounded Warrior Benefit Picks Up Support***

News from the ranking member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs

WASHINGTON, May 9 -- During a lengthy Senate hearing regarding 26 bills affecting benefits for veterans, U.S. Senator Larry Craig received positive reactions to six bills he is sponsoring, including one that would amend the Wounded Warrior legislation he sponsored and Congress passed in 2005.

Craig noted that Toshiro Carrington, a Navy Seal, is one of those who would benefit from a change the Idaho Republican is proposing. Carrington lost his left hand and the top of his right thumb during a training accident at Camp Pendleton in California on December 15, 2004, when an explosive charge was accidentally detonated by another sailor.

"When we passed the original Wounded Warrior benefit, we provided payments to those servicemembers seriously injured and wounded in Afghanistan and Iraq from September 2001 onward. And from December 2005, we covered all U.S. servicemembers seriously injured anywhere in the world. My new legislation this year would extend coverage to all servicemembers, no matter where they were, from the start of the war on terror. Toshiro Carrington is with us today and is one of those who would benefit from the change I am speaking about," said Craig, the ranking member of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Craig's original Wounded Warrior bill has since provided nearly \$200 million to more than 3,000 veterans seriously wounded and injured since the war on terror began in 2001. The payments range from \$25,000 to \$100,000, depending on the severity of the injury. The average payout is approximately \$64,000. Coverage includes injuries such as the loss of limbs, hearing and sight. Payments are generally made within eight weeks after the servicemember is hurt.

But as the Idaho Republican talked about changes that are needed to improve the lives of veterans, he cautioned that if Congress passed all 26 bills now before the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, the total would come to nearly \$100 billion.

"I am not pointing fingers. I have six bills among the 26 we are reviewing today. Our heart tells us to do everything we can for every person who ever wore a uniform, but our pocketbooks tell us we need to prioritize," said Craig.

Spending on VA programs has grown from \$48 billion in 2001 to more than \$80 billion this year.

## ***Akaka Reacts to Report on VA PTSD Compensation***

Released from the Chairman of the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs

WASHINGTON, May 8 – Senator Daniel K. Akaka (D-Hawaii), Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, released the following statement in response to a report by the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council on "PTSD Compensation and Military Service." The report raised questions about the effectiveness of VA's system of assessing and rating post-traumatic stress disorder, a condition that afflicts a large number of combat veterans:

"Our nation's veterans need to have confidence that the assessment and rating systems used to diagnose and treat PTSD are appropriate and consistent, whether they live in Hawaii or Virginia," Akaka said. "Over one million servicemembers have been sent overseas to fight the Global War on Terrorism, and unfortunately, the number of PTSD claims is certain to continue increasing. To ensure that veterans

returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan receive the care they need and deserve, VA must take action now.”

Specifically, Chairman Akaka says the VA should implement the following recommendations made by the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council:

- Establish a specific certification program for raters who deal with PTSD claims, with the training to support it and periodic recertification.
- Make compensation decisions based on the overall affect of PTSD rather than on a veteran’s ability to be “gainfully employed.” (The focus on occupational impairment in the current rating scheme penalizes veterans who can and do work despite their symptoms, and may serve as a disincentive to work.)
- Require a thorough, initial evaluation performed by an experienced professional to improve PTSD compensation ratings decisions.
- Establish a standard amount of time to be devoted to PTSD evaluations, to ensure proper initial examinations and detailed diagnosis, as well as consistency in care and treatment.

“VA must follow-up on the report’s recommendation and make a concerted effort to help disability raters better address the management of PTSD claims,” Chairman Akaka said.

### ***Guard Responds to Florida Wildfires***

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, May 9 – While President Bush toured the site of a deadly tornado in Kansas, the National Guard continues to demonstrate its readiness as it responds to natural disasters from coast to coast.

In Florida, 50 National Guardsmen used two UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters to fight a fire that has ravaged thousands of acres in three central Florida counties. One of the aircraft, dubbed a "Fire Hawk," features a 1,000-gallon tank attached to the belly of the aircraft, which can drop water over a specific target or spread water throughout a larger area. The other Black Hawk assigned to the mission is equipped with a large bucket that can drop more than 600 gallons of water to douse flames.

The two flight crews from Company C, 1st Battalion, 244th Aviation, of Brooksville, Fla., are based at Flagler County Airport, in Palm Coast, the site of the largest fire. As of May 8, the crews had flown 126 sorties and dropped about 101,240 gallons of water.

"With these helicopters, we can put more water on the fire," said Chief Warrant Officer 4 Chris Tenaro, a pilot with the 244th.

The helicopters not only help with fire control, but also provide a quick means of assisting in an emergency, officials said. With such an extensive fire, helicopters can often reach a problem area or assist firefighters on the ground faster than any other mode of transportation.

To read the entire article, click on <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=45960>.

*\*Compiled from state National Guard news releases. Air Force Lt. Col. Ellen Krenke contributed to this article.*

*\*\*Editor’s Note:* According to the State Emergency Operations Center as of May 10, more than 120 Florida Guardsmen have been activated to provide support.

## ***Armed Forces Recruits Take Oath of Enlistment at Florida Ceremony***

By Gerry J. Gilmore

American Forces Press Service

MIAMI, May 4 – Scores of young people raised their right hands and joined America's armed forces during a joint enlistment ceremony.

The mass enlistment, held inside a hangar at Miami's Opa Locka Airport, inducted 120 new members into the Army, Air Force, Marines, Navy or Coast Guard.

Thomas F. Hall, assistant secretary of defense for reserve affairs and a retired Navy rear admiral with 38 years of military service, attended the ceremony and praised the young people for their patriotism.

"I wish I could do it all over again," Hall said to the soon-to-be servicemembers. "But, it's your time to serve. And, you'll soon raise your hand and enter into the ranks of all of those that have served before you and will serve after you."

"I tip my hat to them for the service that they're going to provide to their country," Navy Vice Adm. Marty Chanik, commander of the U.S. 2nd Fleet, based at Norfolk, Va., told the inductees. "I really and deeply appreciate that, and I know that you'll find your service in the military to be a rewarding time. Congratulations to each and every one of you."

Air National Guard Lt. Gen. Craig R. McKinley, director of the Air National Guard, then swore in the group.

"It is such an honor to be wearing that uniform and to be a Marine," Miami Gardens resident Angeline Medina, 17, said after she took her oath of enlistment.

The swearing-in ceremony was part of Fleet Week USA and 2007 McDonald's Air and Sea Show media day activities held in the Fort Lauderdale and Miami region as part of National Military Appreciation Month in May.

The Navy sent some ships and its Leap Frogs Parachute Team to participate in Fleet Week and Air and Sea Show activities in the Miami-Fort Lauderdale area, noted Chanik, who's also the director of the "Combined Joint Operations from the Sea Center of Excellence" in Norfolk.

"We bring some equipment for folks to see, but that's not really what's important," Chanik said.

The key focus of such events, the admiral pointed out, is for civilians to meet and talk with servicemembers "who make a big difference for our country."

One of those servicemembers was Army Staff Sgt. Daniel P. Barnes, a 29-year-old Iraq veteran who hails from Saint Robert, Mo. Barnes lost both of his legs because of a rocket-propelled-grenade attack in Baghdad on Sept. 4, 2006. He praised the "Wounded Warrior Project," a non-profit servicemember support group that helped him when he was recovering from his wounds at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio.

"They came to my room and brought me a backpack filled with clothes and toiletries," Barnes, who is still on active duty, recalled. "I think it is truly amazing; fellow soldiers helping out fellow soldiers."

The Wounded Warrior Project is among the more than 250 businesses and organizations nationwide participating in the Defense Department's America Supports You program, which recognizes citizens' support for military men and women and communicates that support to members of the U.S. armed forces here and abroad.

The media day was a preview of military-themed festivities along Fort Lauderdale's beachfront. Other venues at the airport included a drill-and-ceremony demonstration by the U.S. Air Force Honor Guard, flyovers by the U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds, and static military displays, including Navy F-16 and Air Force F-15 aircraft.

A special surprise guest, the new F-22 Raptor fighter jet, landed on the tarmac. Excited spectators cheered their approval as the sleek aircraft slowly taxied up with its turbines whining.

### ***Florida Employers Cited For Support of Guard, Reserve Members***

By Gerry J. Gilmore

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, May 4 -- Seven Sunshine State employers of National Guardsmen and reservists were honored for exemplary support of their employees during a Defense Department-hosted award ceremony.

Thomas F. Hall, assistant secretary of defense for reserve affairs, was on hand to present the Above and Beyond Awards to the employers. The National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve, a defense department agency that falls under Hall's purview, bestows the awards to employers for exceptional support of employees who are also members of the reserve components.

"Thanks to each one of you for your support," Hall told the award recipients.

Created in 1972, ESGR provides information and education for employers of National Guardsmen and reservists. Additionally, the agency can mediate potential disputes between employers and employees in the Guard or reserves.

Before the award presentations Hall discussed some recent Defense Department policy changes that, among other things, specify one-year mobilizations for reserve-component members. Before the rule change, Hall noted, Guardsmen and reservists were mobilized for 18 to 22 months of service.

Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates made the policy change because employers of Guardsmen and reservists were concerned that their employees were gone for too-lengthy periods of time. About 75,000 members of the National Guard and reserves are currently mobilized, he said.

The armed services now want "to spread the burden" of deployments, so as not to over-stress the active-duty force or the reserve components, he explained.

It'll take a couple of years to establish more deployment predictability, Hall acknowledged, adding that Guard and reserve forces will now be trained and deployed as complete units, rather than being mobilized in "cobbled-up" fashion.

"What we have heard is, unit cohesion is vitally important, particularly to ground-maneuver forces. So, we're going to mobilize as units," Hall said, adding that he'd like employers to provide their input about the changes.

Holy Cross Hospital in Fort Lauderdale is among this year's southern Florida-region recipients of Above and Beyond awards. Luisa Gutman, executive director of human resources, was on hand to accept the award for the hospital.

"I think it's the responsibility of all employers to support the armed services," Gutman said, noting that five of the hospital's employees are currently on active military duty.

Other recipients of this year's Above and Beyond award are: Broward County Sheriff's Office, the City of Fort Lauderdale, the City of Plantation, Lauderhill Police Department, Marine Industries Inc., Nova Southeastern University, Protective Products International, and SR Technologies Inc.

Fort Lauderdale Mayor Jim Naugle accepted the award for his municipality. The Broward County Sheriff's Office also received an Above and Beyond award in 2006. The seven award recipients also signed Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve 5-Star Statements of Support as a symbol of their rededicated support of employees in the Guard or reserve.

The Above and Beyond award is among a series of ESGR-sponsored honors for employers providing programs and policies that exceed requirements of the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act. USERRA specifies re-employment protection and other benefits for veterans and employees returning from military duty.

For the complete story, log onto <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=33057>.

### ***Guard, Reserve Employer-Support Agency Gains New Chief***

By Gerry J. Gilmore

American Forces Press Service

MIAMI, May 7 - Maintaining good communications with civilian employers of National Guardsmen and reservists is a major component of mission success at the National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve, the agency's new chief said in an interview.

Gordon Sumner Jr., a retired Army lieutenant colonel, was appointed as the committee's new executive director March 29.

It is critical, Sumner emphasized, that ESGR maintain open lines of communication with employers of Guard members and reservists, regardless of where they're located.

The national committee's more than 4,200 volunteers at 56 field committees across the United States and its territories serve as advocates for good relations between employers and their military employees, Sumner said during an interview with American Forces Press Service during a National Military Appreciation Month event at Opa Locka Airport here on May 3.

"Volunteers are absolutely the most important piece of this organization," Sumner said. "Our job is to get that information out through an outreach program that is robust, timely and strongly supported, as well as keeping lines of communication that go both ways."

ESGR has logged more than 282,000 hours of volunteer work since the start of the current fiscal year, Sumner said.

Increased communication and interface between ESGR's Arlington, Va., headquarters group, its field committees, and employers of Guardsmen and reservists is paying off, Sumner said, citing a decreasing caseload between ESGR ombudsmen and employers.

"The ombudsman cases are declining rapidly as we grow the Statement of Support (program)," Sumner pointed out. Today, he said, there are only 130 ombudsman-support cases across the country, compared to thousands experienced in past years.

As the war against global terrorism continues, it's more important than ever "to ensure employers are supporting" their employees in the National Guard or reserves, Sumner said.

Read this article in its entirety at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=33072>.

### ***Former Marine Helps Heroes Get Hired***

By Samantha L. Quigley  
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, May 8 – A national program is working to help make it easier for veterans to find meaningful jobs.

"Hire A Hero," a program of the nonprofit California-based Armed Forces Support Foundation, can help take the frustration out of that process, Dan Caulfield, the program's executive director, said.

The program originated as a job program for National Guard members and their families. It was piloted in Georgia and Florida as a way for the National Guard to help recruit and retain members. Today, the Hire A Hero program has expanded across all branches and helps transitioning active military personnel, Guardsmen and reservists find jobs across all industries.

Unemployment among young military veterans can be up to three times as high as their civilian counterparts, he added.

"Even worse, the thing that's harder to prove is the underemployment of military veterans," he said.

There is no reason for this when the economy is dying for this type of quality work force, he added.

"The way we see it is, here are the people we've invested the most in to protect the American dream and they're not getting their fair share of the American dream," Caulfield said.

That's why the Hire A Hero program has stepped up to help veterans, like Michael Sinicrope, grab their piece of the pie.

Sinicrope, a former Marine, transitioned back into civilian life on Oct. 1 after serving his country for four years. During his service he worked as a parachute rigger and air delivery specialist.

"A few months after I transitioned out, my wife called me from work and told me about a program called Hire A Hero," he said in a letter to the organization. "In just 10 minutes I found a job that interested me, and I applied for it."

The employer, the Estancia La Jolla Resort and Spa in California, hired Sinicrope as a security agent soon after the interview.

"I believe my work ethic and everything about being a Marine has incorporated into my new job," he said. "My discipline and integrity gained while serving has also proven to be invaluable traits for what I do now."

Sinicrope said he'd recommend Hire A Hero to his fellow servicemembers preparing to re-enter civilian life. "The jobs are tailored to us, and the employers that use Hire A Hero are looking for people with military experience," he said.

To read the entire article, click on <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=45943>.

### ***TRICARE Uniform Formulary Update Announced***

Released from the U.S. Department of Defense Military Health System

FALLS CHURCH, Va., May 9 – Selected medications are continuing on the TRICARE Uniform Formulary and 10 others have been designated as nonformulary (or third tier) effective Aug. 1, 2007, announced Army Maj. Gen. Elder Granger, TRICARE Management Activity deputy director. A chart showing medications and their status as formulary is available at <http://www.tricare.mil/pressroom/news.aspx?fid=282>.

First-tier medications (formulary generics) are available through a TRICARE Retail Pharmacy for \$3 co-pays for up to a 30-day supply, and through the TRICARE Mail Order Pharmacy for \$3 co-pays for up to a 90-day supply. Beneficiaries may purchase second-tier medications (formulary brand-name) for \$9 for up to the same number of days through a TRICARE Retail Network Pharmacy or through the TRICARE Mail-Order Pharmacy. By using the mail-order pharmacy, beneficiaries may save up to 66 percent on prescriptions. Beneficiary cost-shares in non-network pharmacies are higher.

Beneficiaries taking third-tier medications may consult their health care providers about changing to a first- or second-tier alternative. When providers prescribe medications, beneficiaries should ask if a generic alternative is available that would provide the same clinical results in that drug class.

Beneficiaries can also ask providers if establishing medical necessity for the third-tier medication is appropriate. If medical necessity is established for a third-tier medication, the co-payment is reduced to \$9. Third-tier medications aren't available at military treatment facility pharmacies unless an MTF provider establishes medical necessity and writes the prescription. Medical necessity forms and criteria are available at [www.tricare.mil/pharmacy/medical-nonformulary.cfm](http://www.tricare.mil/pharmacy/medical-nonformulary.cfm).

For a complete list of medications, their formulary status and where they are available, beneficiaries may visit [www.tricareformularysearch.org/dod/medicationcenter/default.aspx](http://www.tricareformularysearch.org/dod/medicationcenter/default.aspx).

Beneficiaries may find more information on the TRICARE Retail Pharmacy and locations, and the TRICARE Mail-Order Pharmacy at [www.express-scripts.com/TRICARE](http://www.express-scripts.com/TRICARE). They may also call 866-363-8779 for the retail pharmacy or 866-363-8667 for the mail-order pharmacy.

For more information about the Uniform Formulary Beneficiary Advisory Panel review process, visit <http://www.tricare.mil/pharmacy/BAP>.

## **Public Health Recommendations Regarding Wildfire Smoke**

From the State of Florida, State Emergency Response Team

Due to the recent wildfires affecting the state, the Florida Department of Health is providing health recommendations to citizens impacted by the wildfire smoke.

Smoke is a respiratory irritant, and can cause a scratchy throat, and/or irritated eyes and nose. Smoke may also worsen conditions such as asthma and other chronic respiratory or lung conditions.

There are many steps you can take to protect yourself and your family from the health effects of smoke:

- Be your own health judge. If you can see smoke outside, or you feel the effects of the smoke, avoid prolonged outdoor activities. It is especially important to limit time spent outdoors for children and persons with existing medical conditions.
- Stay indoors whenever possible. Run your air conditioner with a clean filter and the fresh air intake closed, to prevent additional smoke from entering your home. If you don't have an air conditioner, and are at a comfortable temperature inside with the windows closed, stay inside. If your home is too warm, seek alternative shelter.
- Keep particle levels inside and around your home lower by not burning outdoor yard waste, smoking tobacco, or using anything that burns, such as wood fireplaces, gas logs, gas stoves and candles.
- Delay vacuuming when possible, as vacuuming stirs up particles already inside your home.
- Follow your doctor's advice about taking your medications and adhere to your asthma management plan if you have asthma or other lung disease. Call your doctor if your symptoms worsen.
- Stay alert to any news coverage or health warnings related to smoke. Pay attention to local air quality reports. For more information on the air quality index and recommendations, please visit <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/air/airquality.htm>.

For further information, please contact your local county health department or visit [www.doh.state.fl.us](http://www.doh.state.fl.us) or [www.FloridaDisaster.org](http://www.FloridaDisaster.org). The Florida Emergency Information Line is 1-800-342-3557.

## **Governor Crist Announces Hurricane Preparedness Sales Tax Holiday**

*Provides tax break on disaster supplies June 1-12*

Released from the Governor's Communications Office

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. – Governor Charlie Crist signed into law House Bill 211 establishing a sales tax holiday from June 1-12, 2007, for hurricane preparedness items.

Governor Crist encouraged all Floridians to update their disaster plans and to use the tax holiday during the first 12 days of June as an opportunity to restock disaster supply kits. Below are a few examples of items that will be exempt during the sales tax holiday.

- Flashlights and other portable, self-powered light sources – \$20 or less
- Portable radios, two-way radios and weather-band radios – \$75 or less
- Tarps – \$50 or less
- Gas or diesel fuel containers – \$25 or less

- Batteries – \$30 or less (AAA, AA, C and D cell, and 6 and 9 volt batteries)
- Non-electrical food storage coolers – \$30 or less
- Portable generators – \$1,000 or less
- Carbon monoxide detectors – \$75 or less
- Storm shutter devices – \$200 or less

For more information on the 2007 Hurricane Preparedness Sales Tax Holiday or to find information on building a customized family or business disaster plan, please visit [www.FloridaDisaster.org](http://www.FloridaDisaster.org) or [www.myflorida.com](http://www.myflorida.com)

## **2007 Legislative Session Report**

### **End of Regular Session**

The Legislature finished its business at 4 p.m. May 4. The Florida House of Representatives and the Florida Senate passed 345 bills over the course of the 60-day Regular Session. As widely reported, they will return to Tallahassee on June 12-22, 2007, for a Special Session, which was called by the two presiding officers of the Legislature May 9 to consider ad valorem tax issues.

This was a very successful session for the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs. Pending the Governor's final approval, all three of the department's legislative policy priorities passed, and all of its Governor-approved budget requests received funding. As for the Special Session, FDVA does not anticipate having any issues up for consideration before the Legislature.

The General Appropriations Act, AKA "the budget," was presented to the Governor May 9. He has 15 days in which to consider it. He may sign the Budget in total, veto it in total, or sign it with line-item vetoes of specific appropriations of his choice.

The following table displays bills of interest to veterans that passed the Legislature. None of these bills have yet been presented to the Governor, but once he approves or vetoes a bill, we will go into further detail regarding the effects of that particular legislation.

As always, if you wish to view any of the bills the department tracked during the Regular Session, you are welcome to visit the tracking Web page at <http://www.floridavets.org/information/legislink.asp>.

<b>Bill</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Sponsor</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>Date Legislature Approved</b>
0981	State Parks	Culp	State Parks/Rule Violations; requires that active member of Florida National Guard, or dependent of such member, be charged only half price of admission to state park; EFFECTIVE DATE: 07/01/2007.	5/2/2007

0116	Robert A. Wise Military Protection Act	Atwater	Armed Forces Member/Use of Name or Likeness; prohibits use of name or image of member of armed forces for certain purposes without obtaining consent in manner prescribed by applicable state law; defines term "member of armed forces"; provides penalties for such unauthorized use. EFFECTIVE DATE: 07/01/2007.	5/2/2007
0122	Child Custody/Not Modifying Child Custody	Posey	Child Custody/Not Modifying Child Custody; prohibits court from modifying child custody during time parent is activated, deployed, or temporarily assigned to military service; provides limited exception; requires reinstatement upon parent's return from military service; limits application of prohibition. EFFECTIVE DATE: 07/01/2007.	5/4/2007
0156	Veterans Defined/Wartime Service	Geller	Veterans Defined/Wartime Service; redefines term "veteran" for purposes of construing Florida Statutes to include person who served in active military, naval, or air service in Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom. EFFECTIVE DATE: 07/01/2007.	5/2/2007
0412	Education/Children of POWs or MIAs	Baker	Education/Children of POWs or MIAs; expands provision of educational opportunity at state expense for children of servicemembers, or civilian personnel captured while serving with consent or authorization of United States Government, who are classified as prisoners of war or missing in action. EFFECTIVE DATE: 07/01/2007.	4/24/2007
0500	Instant Bingo	Saunders (B)	Instant Bingo; cites act as "Evelyn Wiesman-Price Act"; defines terms "deal", "flare" and "instant bingo"; exempts instant bingo from specified prohibitions; provides requirements for operation of instant bingo games and use of proceeds and prize payout; provides requirements for manufacture and sale of instant bingo tickets; provides penalties, etc. EFFECTIVE DATE: 07/01/2007.	5/1/2007
0517	Financial Responsibility for Motor Vehicles	Evers	Financial Responsibility for Motor Vehicles; provides that member of United States Armed Forces called to or on active duty outside state or United States is exempt from providing required proof of financial responsibility as owner, registrant, or operator of motor vehicle under specified conditions; provides for eligibility and limitations. EFFECTIVE DATE: 07/01/2007.	5/2/2007

0699*	Veteran/Public Employment Preference	Sachs	Veteran/Public Employment Preference; repeals specified provision regarding expiration of preference in public employment and retention in public employment given to specified veterans and spouses thereof after application of such preference; corrects cross-reference, to conform. EFFECTIVE DATE: 07/01/2007.	4/19/2007
1026*	Ad Valorem Tax/Disabled Veterans	Haridopolos	Ad Valorem Tax/Disabled Veterans; implements s. (6) (g), Art. VII of State Constitution; provides that certain disabled veterans must receive discount from amount of ad valorem tax levied on their homestead property; provides conditions under which discount applies; provides application procedures; authorizes governing body of county to waive requirement that annual application be made for veteran's disability discount, etc. EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon becoming law.	5/2/2007
1448	Service Members/Dependent Assistance	Military Affairs and Domestic Security	Service Members/Dependent Assistance; provides that eligibility for Family Readiness Program continues for specified period following termination of servicemember's orders and his or her return home; revises provisions requiring that inspector general conduct reviews and audits of program. EFFECTIVE DATE: 07/01/2007.	5/2/2007
1630*	U.S. Marine Corps License Plate/Fee	Patronis, Hill	U.S. Marine Corps License Plate/Fee; revises authorized allocation of annual use fee. EFFECTIVE DATE: 07/01/2007.	4/30/2007
1900	Specialty License Plates	Baker	Specialty License Plates; discontinues annual use fee for Girl Scout license plate; increases annual use fee for Sea Turtle and Fla. Sheriffs Youth Ranches license plate; establishes annual use fees for Fla. NASCAR, Corrections Foundation, Protect Fla. Springs, Support Our Troops, and Trees Are Cool license plates; authorizes use of specified percentage of proceeds from sale of Fla. Educational license plate for marketing and promotion expenses, etc. EFFECTIVE DATE: 10/01/2007 except as otherwise provided.	5/2/2007

\* - FDVA legislative policy priorities

Legislative Factoid: *You can learn in which Chamber a bill was introduced by a simple look at the bill number. Odd numbered bills were introduced in the Florida House of Representatives, and even numbered bills were introduced in the Florida Senate.*

## **News from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

### ***New VA Advisory Panel to Improve Services for Returning Combat Veterans***

WASHINGTON, May 8 – Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson announced the formation of a formal, 17-person committee that will advise him on ways to improve VA programs serving veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom and their families.

"This panel will report directly to me," Nicholson said. "I am asking for their ideas and input on how VA can consistently ensure world-class service to America's newest generation of heroes, particularly severely disabled veterans and their families."

The Secretary's announcement about the Department of Veterans Affairs panel, called the Advisory Committee on OIF/OEF Veterans and Families, comes on the heels of his presentation April 24 of recommendations from a presidential task force to improve services to the nation's newest generation of combat veterans.

"A number of panels already have been asking tough questions about our programs for veterans transitioning to civilian life," Nicholson added. "This committee, to be chaired by retired Lt. Gen. David Barno, consists of OIF and OEF wounded veterans, family members, survivors, leaders of the major veterans organizations and long-time veterans advocates."

"This group of people have experienced war and our system of care and can advise me from first-hand experience on how we are doing and what we need to do better," Nicholson added.

The new OIF/OEF advisory committee will hold a three-day inaugural meeting, beginning May 14 in Alexandria, Va. The committee is scheduled to discuss its general work program, future meeting dates, and plans for site visits to VA facilities around the country.

The schedule includes briefings by senior officials of VA's key programs, comments by members of the public who register in advance with the committee, discussions about "seamless transition" goals and procedures affecting combat veterans moving from the military to civilian life.

Members of the VA Advisory Committee on OIF/OEF Veterans and Families are: Lt. Gen. Barno of Washington, D.C.; Dawn Halfaker of Washington, D.C.; Lonnie Moore of San Diego; Jack L. Tilley of Riverview, Fla.; Gary Wilson of Carlsbad, Calif.; Liza Biggers of New York City; Pam Estes of Dayton, Md.; Caroline Maney of Shalimar, Fla.; Kimberly Hazelgrove of Lorton, Va.; Michael Ayoub of Ashburn, Va.; Rocky McPherson of Tallahassee, Fla.; John Sommer of Annandale, Va.; Dennis Donovan of Atlanta; Frances Hackett of South Plainfield, N.J.; Paul F. Livengood of Manassas, Va.; Tim McClain of Alexandria, Va.; and Chris Yoder of Baltimore.

People seeking more information about the committee or who wish to register to make a statement of up to five minutes should contact VA's Tiffany Glover by e-mail at [tiffany.glover@va.gov](mailto:tiffany.glover@va.gov).

### ***Nursing: A Profession and a Passion***

It's National Nurses Week (May 6-12); a big week for nurses and a big week for VA. This year's theme, "Nursing: A Profession and a Passion," reflects the profession's duality as both an art and a science—a calling that requires clinical expertise, technical skill, and compassion. Today's VA nurses are devoted care givers as well as responsible professionals.

During National Nurses Week, we honor the men and women who touch the lives of veterans every day -- VA nurses. VA has one of the largest nurse work forces of any health care system in the world. Numbering more than 61,000 nationwide, the VA nursing team -- composed of registered nurses, licensed practical nurses/licensed vocational nurses, and nursing assistants — provides comprehensive, complex, and compassionate care to the nation's veterans. They help veterans regain and maintain their health, and they teach them to live fully with their disabilities.

VA nurses are central to many of VA's seamless transition efforts for servicemembers returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. VA nurses work as case managers coordinating entry into the VA system, rehabilitation specialists helping patients return to active duty or to daily life, and as inpatient clinicians managing complex acute care patient situations. They are the backbone of VA health care.

### ***Wear Your Medals on Memorial Day***

WASHINGTON -- The Department of Veterans Affairs calls on all veterans to express their patriotism and pride on Memorial Day and other major patriotic holidays through a display of medals earned in their military service.

Join your comrades in public display of your military decorations. It's a way to show your community the spirit of America's veterans and remind your neighbors of the service and sacrifice of those who guarded democracy.

As we salute America's heroes on Memorial Day, Veterans Day and the Fourth of July, wear your medals and show your pride, whether participating in public observances or relaxing with family and friends.

Your medals tell a story of service in the cause of freedom that all Americans need to hear. For more information, visit the VA's Web site at: [www.va.gov/veteranspride/](http://www.va.gov/veteranspride/)

### ***Florida National Cemetery Memorial Day Ceremony***

BUSHNELL, Fla. – The Florida National Cemetery will hold its annual Memorial Day Ceremony, sponsored by the Joint Veterans Committee on May 28, 2007 at 10 a.m. Executive Director of the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs Rear Admiral LeRoy Collins Jr., USNR (Ret.) will be the ceremony keynote speaker.

Guests are invited to arrive early and enjoy the patriotic and inspirational musical prelude, which will begin approximately 15 minutes prior to the Memorial Day Ceremony. The Joint Veterans Committee and the Florida National Cemetery extend an invitation to all veterans' organizations and the general public to take this opportunity to remember the men and women who served and gave so much to protect our great nation. Organizations with colors are invited to participate in the massing of colors at the beginning of the program. Veterans' organizations should plan to arrive by 8:30 a.m.

The Florida National Cemetery Visitor's Center will be open to the public on Memorial Day from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Cemetery representatives will be on duty to assist visitors with inquiries.

### **DIRECTIONS TO THE CEMETERY**

Take Interstate 75 to Exit 309 (Webster) turning right and heading west approximately one-half mile to the cemetery entrance, which will be on the left.

Seating is limited; those attending are encouraged to arrive early, wear comfortable clothing and bring a lawn chair or blanket to sit on. A special parking area is designated for individuals with wheelchairs and scooters at Committal Shelter B. Parking is also available for the physically disabled near the ceremony site. Cemetery personnel will be assisting attendees upon arrival at the cemetery.

For further information, please contact the cemetery office Monday – Friday from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. by calling (352) 793-7740.

## **2007 Veteran Organization Convention Schedule and Events**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Contact</b>
Korean War Veterans Association, Department of Florida	2007 Annual State Convention	May 11-13	Kenilworth Lodge Sebring	Joan Arcand <a href="mailto:Richard.arcand@verizon.net">Richard.arcand@verizon.net</a>
Lakeland Area Multiple Sclerosis Support Group	Support group meeting for vets, family and friends of people with MS	May 12 1 p.m.	DAV Chapter 28 303 Veterans Ave. S. Lakeland	Lisa Garcia (863) 644-0239 <a href="http://home.earthlink.net/~tbl5142">http://home.earthlink.net/~tbl5142</a>
Vietnam Veterans of America	Florida State Council Meeting	June 8-10	Holiday Inn Hotel and Suites Universal 5905 Kirkman Road Orlando	Jerry Klein <a href="mailto:jaklein9@adelphia.net">jaklein9@adelphia.net</a> Florida State Council (561)797-9475
AMVETS Department of Florida	Department Convention	June 8-10	Rosen Centre Hotel 9840 International Drive, Orlando	Bill McRoberts (352) 669-9490
Marine Corps League Department of Florida	Annual Convention	June 14-17	Ramada Plaza Hotel Gateway 7470 Highway 192 West, Kissimmee	John Ring <a href="mailto:ringjh@earthlink.net">ringjh@earthlink.net</a>

Editor's Note: Veteran Service Organizations in Florida provided the information in the table above. If you would like to submit event information to include in the *e-floridavetsNews*, please e-mail the editor, Courtney Heidelberg, at [heidelbergc@fdva.state.fl.us](mailto:heidelbergc@fdva.state.fl.us).

## **Florida Job Fair Information**

Job fair information from the Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation is available online at [http://www.floridajobs.org/onestop/os\\_job\\_fairs.html](http://www.floridajobs.org/onestop/os_job_fairs.html).

## **Upcoming Military Air Show in Florida**

**Blue Angels – U.S. Navy Flight Demonstration Squadron**

July 21: Pensacola Beach

## **Supporting Veterans**

### ***License Plates Support Florida Veterans' Homes***

Your purchase of the "**Florida Salutes Veterans**" or one of the **approved Army, Navy, Air Force or Coast Guard Military Service license plates** helps people who need it most, when they need it most. The entire \$15 surcharge goes into a Trust Fund for the operation and maintenance of critically needed Veterans' Homes in Florida. A portion of the Marine Corps License Plate also supports the State Veterans' Homes Program.

### ***Headstones and Markers***

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs furnishes upon request, at no charge to the applicant, a government headstone or marker for the grave of any deceased eligible veteran in any cemetery around the world. For all deaths occurring before Sept. 11, 2001, the VA may provide a headstone or marker only for graves that are not marked with a private headstone.

Spouses and dependents buried in a private cemetery are not eligible for a government-provided headstone or marker.

Flat markers in granite, marble, and bronze and upright headstones in granite and marble are available. The style chosen must be consistent with existing monuments at the place of burial. Niche markers are also available to mark columbaria used for inurnment of cremated remains.

When burial or memorialization is in a national cemetery, a headstone or marker will be ordered by the cemetery officials based on inscription information provided by the next of kin. When burial is in a private cemetery, [VA Form 40-1330, Application for Standard Government Headstone or Marker](#) (PDF), must be submitted by the next of kin or a representative, such as funeral director, cemetery official or veterans counselor, along with [veterans military discharge documents](#), to request a Government-provided headstone or marker. Do not send original documents, as they will not be returned.

To learn more information regarding headstones and markers including eligibility criteria, placing orders, inscriptions, replacements and more, click on [http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/hm\\_hm.asp](http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/hm_hm.asp).

### ***Homeowners Assistance***

June is National Homeownership Month and the Florida Housing Finance Corporation will host a number of events in Orlando, including a 2007 Homebuyer Expo for veterans and military servicemembers, as well as other professionals. The expo will be held on June 16 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Orange County Convention Center, Hall D2-West Building and includes hundreds of exhibits and booths showcasing resources available to secure affordable housing.

Highlights of the expo include free credit reports and credit counseling, workshops and seminars on securing financing, understanding the loan closing process and determining how much you can afford. This is a great opportunity for the general public to find out about local, state and federal affordable housing programs. Registration is free for consumers and parking is free if you pre-register online at <http://www.floridahousing.org/Expo/GeneralPublic/GeneralPublicOverview.htm>

For more information on National Homeownership Month events, visit the expo Web site at [www.floridahousing.org/expo](http://www.floridahousing.org/expo).

### ***Air Compassion for Veterans***

From Air Compassion for Veterans

VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. -- Air Compassion for Veterans provides medically related air transport services to troops, veterans and their families affected by military deployment in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. ACV is committed to the ongoing healing process and will provide transport for activities that aid in the process.

Air Compassion for Veterans provides no-cost travel services for eligible troops, veterans and their families. The organization serves to arrange and provide charitable patient travel that does not duplicate any of the efforts of any other charities.

You may access help provided by Air Compassion for Veterans by calling 1-888-662-6794. Learn more about Air Compassion for Veterans by logging on to [www.AirCompassionforVeterans.org](http://www.AirCompassionforVeterans.org).

### **State of Florida Veterans' Homes**

Take a [virtual tour](#) of a State Veterans' Nursing or Domiciliary Home. The tour includes ten 360-degree fully interactive pictures. No additional software is required to view these images. Simply click on the desired picture and the tour begins.

### **Links and References for Veterans**

[Click here](#) for a downloadable copy of the **Florida Veterans' Benefits Guide**.

[Ask Benefits Questions Via E-MAIL](#): For specific Compensation and Pension benefits questions and local regional office issues, the contact list is by state and geographical area of jurisdiction.

[Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents](#) (Current Edition) - The current edition of this booklet lists the variety of federal benefits available to veterans and their dependents. Selecting the link above will allow you to download the booklet as a [PDF](#) file in English or Spanish.

La versión en Español de el folleto "Beneficios Federales para los Veteranos y sus Dependientes", el cual explica la variedad de beneficios disponibles para los veteranos y sus dependientes, se encuentra disponible en versión PDF al presionar [aquí](#).

[VA State Summary for Florida](#) – As of December 2006.

[Florida Veterans Mobile Service Center](#) - The Florida Veterans Mobile Service Center uses a state of the art 40-foot van equipped with two exam rooms, as well as facilities for dental care, to travel the state performing intervention with homeless veterans who live in rural encampments. This mobile unit offers a unique opportunity to provide homeless veterans immediate assistance of food and clothing, health screening and assessment, VA benefit determination and counseling, as well as assessment of housing, mental health, substance abuse, employment, educational and vocational needs. The Mobile Service Center is owned and operated by Volunteers of America of Florida and partners with the U.S. Department

of Veterans Affairs to provide services to homeless veterans. For more information about Volunteers of America of Florida's programs and services please call 888-873-0909.

The Mobile Service Center will host the following events in Florida soon:

May 26-27 Panama City Stand Down  
June 29-30 Miami Stand Down

[Florida Government](#)

[Federal Government](#)

[Florida State University's Institute on World War II and the Human Experience](#)

[Library of Congress, Veterans History Project](#)

[Issues and Action: Federal Veterans Issues](#)

[Find your member of Congress](#)

[United States Senate](#)

[U.S. House of Representatives](#)

[Combat Veterans Information](#)

[Transition Assistance Program](#)

[Survivors Benefits](#)

[Women Veterans Information](#)

[National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder](#)

(Some links require [Adobe Acrobat Reader, which can be downloaded here.](#))

[Florida Relay Service](#)

If you or someone you know is hearing or speech impaired, you should know about the resources available from the Florida Relay Service. The Florida Relay Service is the communications link for people who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf/blind, or speech-impaired. Through the Florida Relay Service, people who use specialized telephone equipment can communicate with people who use standard telephone equipment. To call Florida Relay, dial 7-1-1, or use the appropriate toll free numbers:

- 1-800-955-8771 (TTY)
- 1-800-955-8770 (Voice)
- 1-877-955-8773 (Spanish)
- 1-877-955-8707 (French Creole)

More information is available from the Florida Relay Service Web site at <http://www.ftri.org/>. Also, you may write to the Florida Relay Service at 1820 East Park Ave., Suite 101, Tallahassee, FL 32301.

## **Florida Web sites with Information on the State's Wildfire and Drought Situation**

**[Florida Division of Forestry – Daily Situation Report](#)**

**[Florida Highway Patrol – Highway Closures](#)**

**[Florida Division of Emergency Management – Current Information](#)**

**[Florida Division of Emergency Management – Wildfire Information](#)**

**[Florida Division of Emergency Management – Drought Information](#)**

**[State of Florida Family Disaster Planning Web site](#)**

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### ***Editor's Note***

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