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FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS

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www.FloridaVets.org

FDVA Prepares for 2011 Legislative Session

TALLAHASSEE -- Florida's 2011 legislative session, which opens March 8, promises to be a busy one for members of the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs.

FDVA senior managers have been meeting with Senate and House policy and budget committees during January in preparation for the upcoming session.

Policy issues will take a back seat to the budget this session, as in previous sessions.

There are four bills being introduced by FDVA during the upcoming session.

The first bill recognizes the veterans of Operation New Dawn in Iraq, which began in September 2010 as a follow-on to Operation Iraqi Freedom. The bill,

which places Operation New Dawn in Florida Statutes, is designated Senate Bill 430 and House Bill 171, sponsored by Sen. Thad Altman and Rep. Mark Pafford.

The second bill proposes to add Gold Star parents to the list of those eligible for free lifetime admission to Florida State Parks. The bill, which focuses on parents of those who have fallen in combat, is designated Senate Bill 236 and House Bill 95, by Sen. Alan Hays and Rep. Leonard Bembry.

The third bill proposes to make Aug. 7 of each year Purple Heart Day in Florida. The bill, currently in the works, is sponsored by Sen. Maria Sachs and Rep. Rachel Burgin.

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

These veterans will still be able to apply for health benefits with VA

sponsored bill seeks to establish a Florida Veterans Hall of Fame, to be placed in the Capitol. The bill, also in the drafting stage, is sponsored by Sen. Mike Bennett and Rep. Gayle Harrell.

FDVA will be presenting a business plan for the operation of the Domiciliary and State Veterans' Nursing Homes to the Governor and Cabinet for approval. This approach keeps the Homes under state authority with a more direct oversight relationship with the Governor and Cabinet.

Interested parties can follow the progress of veteran-related bills by visiting the FDVA website at www.FloridaVets.org and accessing the section entitled *Legislative Issues*.

after Jan. 27, 2011, but will have their status for receiving VA health care determined under normal VA procedures that base health care priority status on the severity of a service-connected disability or other eligibility factors.

Veterans can apply for enrollment online at www.1010ez.med.va.gov/sec/vha/1010ez or by calling 1-877-222-8387.

News of the Month

2011 Legislative Session
Health Care Deadline
FDVA Joins Facebook
Small Business Checks
Paper Checks to End
DoD Vietnam War Tribute
St. Johns County Award
Prescription Drug Card

Conferences and Events

References for Veterans

FDVA Joins Social Media Site

TALLAHASSEE -- The Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs is now on *Facebook*, the social network service and website.

"The Sunshine State has more than 1.6 million veterans, including 200,000 returning veterans

from Iraq and Afghanistan who claim Florida as their home of record," said Steve Murray, FDVA communications director.

"Through Facebook, we hope to reach veterans and their families who use social media as a means of communication, and inform them of the benefits and services they have earned."

Moore Consulting Group in Tallahassee assisted FDVA with development of the site, which drives viewers to FDVA's website at www.FloridaVets.org



Deadline Approaches for Some Combat Veterans

Courtesy of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

WASHINGTON -- Certain combat veterans who were discharged from active duty service before Jan. 28, 2003 have until Thursday to take advantage of their enhanced health care enrollment opportunity through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

The enhanced enrollment window was provided for

VA Set to Verify Veteran Small Businesses

Courtesy of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

WASHINGTON -- To further advocate for veterans, VA announced that companies identifying themselves as small businesses or veteran-owned businesses to gain priority for some U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs contracts must now provide documentation verifying their status within 90 days of receiving notice from the agency.

“VA is committed to doing business with as well as supporting and protecting veteran-owned small businesses,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “Although the verification process may initially be a challenge to some small business owners and to VA, it’s a necessary step to eliminate misrepresentation by firms trying to receive contracts that should go to service-disabled and other veteran-owned vendors.”

The Veterans Benefits Act of 2010, signed by the President Oct. 13, expanded VA’s requirement to verify the status of businesses claiming veterans preference to compete for VA contracts by being listed in VA’s VetBiz.gov “Vendor Information Pages” database.

Companies will have to submit an application to substantiate their status as owned and controlled by veterans, service-disabled veterans or eligible surviving spouses. Only companies that submit the information will be listed in the VIP database.

For more information, visit www.va.gov/osdbu/

Treasury Department Says No Paper Checks for VA Benefits After 2013

Courtesy of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

WASHINGTON -- The Department of the Treasury announced a new rule that will extend the safety and convenience of electronic payments to millions of Americans and phase out paper checks for federal benefits by March 1, 2013.

On that date, VA will stop issuing paper checks. People who do not have electronic payments for their federal benefits by that time will receive their funds via a pre-paid debit card.

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

For more information or to change VA benefits to direct deposit, visit www.GoDirect.org or call 1-800-827-1000.



Defense Department Begins Project for Vietnam War Veterans

Courtesy of American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON -- More than three decades after the war’s end, the Defense Department has begun a project to pay tribute to the nation’s Vietnam War veterans.

The 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemoration was spawned from the 2008 National Defense Authorization Act.

“It was a very important time period for veterans, because most Vietnam veterans as a whole never received the homecoming that our troops receive now,” said Army Lt. Col. Hunter Holliday, public affairs officer for the commemoration.

At the center of the project is a website, “50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemoration,” at <http://www.vietnamwar50th.com>, which will serve as a clearinghouse for information on the war once it is fully functional, a milestone expected this spring.

Information gleaned from the website is expected to be used for myriad purposes, such as to chronicle facts, provide educational materials, and offer resources for a commemorative partners program, Holliday said.

The partners program will comprise guidance and materials for agencies, veterans groups, local government and nongovernment organizations to conduct their own Vietnam War commemoration activities.

A calendar will also list major DOD-sponsored events.

Veterans Service Office Wins Award

Courtesy of St. Johns County, Florida

ST. AUGUSTINE -- The St. Johns County Veterans Service Office was named 2010 State Service Office of the Year by the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Department of Florida. The VFW award was presented during a county commission meeting Dec. 21, 2010.



Marine Corps Reserve Sgt. Nicolle Hernandez and Frank Strom, Hillsborough County Veterans Affairs Division Manager, present flowers to Jane Collins, wife of the late LeRoy Collins Jr. The life of retired Navy Reserve Rear Adm. LeRoy Collins Jr. was celebrated during a building renaming ceremony Dec. 8, 2010 at the Veterans Memorial Park and Museum in Tampa. *Photo by Ruslana Panov.*

Veteran Organization Conventions, Events and Job Fairs

Sponsor	Event	Date	Location	Contact Information
Military Officers Association of America	Florida Council of Chapters Winter President's Meeting	January 28-29	Emerald Grande Resort, Destin	(727) 641-5979
State Rep. Maria Sachs	Veterans' Workshops	February 4	Century Villages in Deerfield Beach (8 a.m.) Boca Raton (11 a.m.) & West Palm Beach (2 p.m.)	(561) 279-1427
Job Zone & The American Legion	Wounded Warrior Job Fair	February 10 9 a.m. - Noon <i>(Persons with disabilities)</i> Noon - 3 p.m. <i>(Everyone)</i>	American Legion Department HQ, 1912A Lee Road, Orlando	(540) 775-4199 www.JobZoneOnline.com
Military.com	Patrick AFB Military Career Expo	February 15 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.	International Palms Resort & Conference Center, Cocoa Beach	(703) 270-7169 www.military.com
AMVETS, Department of Florida	Spring State Executive Committee	February 16-20	Rosen Centre Hotel, Orlando	(813) 626-3408
Air Force Association	Air Warfare Symposium and Technology Exposition	February 17-18	Rosen Shingle Creek Hotel, Orlando	(703) 247-5800 www.afa.org
Florida Department of Financial Services	Veterans Connect Fair	February 25 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.	John Boy Auditorium, Clewiston	(863) 675-5250 www.myfloridacfo.com
WorkNet Pinellas & Bay Pines VA Medical Center	Veterans Job Fair	February 25 Noon - 4 p.m.	J.C. Cobb Room, Bay Pines VA Medical Center, Bay Pines	(727) 538-7370, Ext. 336
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs	Job Fair & Career Expo	April 16 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.	Orlando VA Medical Center, 5201 Raymond Street, Orlando	(321) 397-6272
Naval Aviation Museum Foundation	2011 Symposium	May 4-6	National Museum of Naval Aviation, NAS Pensacola	(800) 327-5002 www.NavalAviationMuseum.org
Vietnam and All Veterans of Florida State Coalition	24th Annual Florida Vietnam and All Veterans Reunion	May 5-8	Wickham Park, Melbourne	(321) 453-7498 www.FloridaVeteransReunion.com
American Military Retirees Association, Department of Florida	Annual Convention	May 7 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.	DAV Hall, 1150 SW California Blvd., Port St. Lucie	(772) 342-2653

Editor's Note: All times local. Florida's Veterans Service Organizations and veteran-related agencies provided the information in the table above. To submit event information, contact the editor at MurrayR@fdva.state.fl.us

President Signs Improvements to Post-9/11 GI Bill

Courtesy of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

WASHINGTON -- President Obama signed legislation Jan. 4 that streamlines the 18-month-old education program administered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Information about the new provisions is available online at www.gibill.va.gov

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Did You Know?

TALLAHASSEE -- Florida currently has seven veterans in the U.S. House of Representatives and one veteran in the U.S. Senate.

In addition, the Executive Office of the Governor has several prominent veterans.

Gov. Rick Scott is a Navy veteran and Lt. Gov. Jennifer Carroll is a retired Navy lieutenant commander. Scott's chief of staff, Mike Prendergast, is a retired Army colonel.

References for Veterans

2011 Florida Veterans' Benefits Guide

www.FloridaVets.org -- then click on "Benefits Guide"

Federal Benefits for Veterans & Dependents Guide

http://www1.va.gov/OPA/publications/benefits_book.asp

Florida Veterans Foundation

www.FloridaVeteransFoundation.org

Employ Florida Vets - veteran employment resources

<http://veterans.employflorida.com/portals/veteran/>

Florida's State Veterans' Nursing Homes

www.floridavets.org/tours.asp

Florida's Veteran Service Organizations

www.floridavets.org/organization/commanders.asp

Florida Department of Military Affairs

<http://dma.myflorida.com/>

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

www.va.gov

Burial, Headstone and Marker Information (VA)

www.cem.va.gov

Returning OEF/OIF Veterans (VA)

<http://www.oefoif.va.gov/>

National Resource Directory - for wounded warriors

<http://www.nationalresourcedirectory.gov/>

Post-9/11 G.I. Bill and Veteran Education Benefits

www.gibill.va.gov

www.service2scholars.org

National VA Homeless Hotline - 24 Hour

Toll Free at 1-877-424-3838

National Veteran Suicide Prevention - 24 Hour

www.mentalhealth.va.gov

Toll Free at 1-800-273-8255, Press 1

Social Security Administration

www.socialsecurity.gov

Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve

www.esgr.mil

Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Businesses

www.osd.dms.state.fl.us

Center for Women Veterans

<http://www1.va.gov/womenvet/>

Florida Veterans Foundation Offers Discount Drug Card

Courtesy of the Florida Veterans Foundation

TALLAHASSEE -- The Florida Veterans Foundation is introducing a new Prescription Drug Card that is accepted at more than 50,000 pharmacies nationwide.

The free card is available to both veterans and non-veterans, and can be used to provide prescription discounts averaging about 30 percent.

To download and activate a card or for more information, visit www.FloridaVeteransFoundation.org



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Florida's Veterans' Homes

Robert H. Jenkins Jr. Veterans' Domiciliary Home

(Columbia County) *Lake City* (386) 758-0600

Emory L. Bennett State Veterans' Nursing Home

(Volusia County) *Daytona Beach* (386) 274-3460

Baldomero Lopez State Veterans' Nursing Home

(Pasco County) *Land O' Lakes* (813) 558-5000

Alexander Nininger State Veterans' Nursing Home

(Broward County) *Pembroke Pines* (954) 985-4824

Clifford C. Sims State Veterans' Nursing Home

(Bay County) *Springfield* (850) 747-5401

Douglas T. Jacobson State Veterans' Nursing Home

(Charlotte County) *Port Charlotte* (941) 613-0919

Clyde E. Lassen State Veterans' Nursing Home

(St. Johns County) *St. Augustine* (904) 940-2193

Supporting Veterans' Homes

Your purchase of the *Florida Salutes Veterans* or one of the approved Army, Navy, Air Force or Coast Guard license plates directly helps veterans.



The \$15 surcharge goes into a trust fund for the operation and maintenance of Florida's veterans' homes.

A portion of the Marine Corps and *Support Our Troops* license plates also supports the State Veterans' Homes Program.

Anyone can purchase these plates.

You may also support the State Homes for Veterans Trust Fund by making a \$1 contribution when renewing your Florida Driver License.



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