



The Alabama Veteran

“Proudly Serving America’s Finest”

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WINTER 2011

IMPORTANT DATES

- February 14 - St. Valentine's Day
- February 21 - Presidents Day/Washington's Birthday
- April 1 - SBVA Meeting
- April 18 - Tax Day
- April 24 - Easter

Groundbreaking Ceremony Celebrates New State Veterans Home



Members of the State Board of Veterans Affairs broke ground on the new Colonel Robert L. Howard State Veterans Home in Pell City. From the left, Wayne Dial, Byron White, Joe McDonald, Vice Chairman Ken Rollins, Commissioner Clyde Marsh, Deputy Vice Chairwoman Dolores “Dee” Hardin, Veterans Homes Coordinator Kim Justice, Linda Turner-Gaines, Bill Wyatt, Charles Stephens and Chad Richmond.

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A groundbreaking ceremony for Alabama's new state veterans home was held on the campus of Jefferson State Community College in Pell City on Nov. 30.

Local and State officials were on hand for the ceremony that symbolized the beginning of the construction phase of the state's fourth and largest care facility for Alabama Veterans.

“Anytime we can do anything positive for veterans, it's a great day,” said Clyde Marsh, commissioner of the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs.”

Marsh said the comprehensive effort between the State Board of Veterans Affairs and local, state and federal agencies has made the veterans home a reality.

“The State Board of Veterans Affairs always does what is best and what is in the best interest for our veterans.”

In November, the ADVA announced that Doster Construction Company of Birmingham will oversee the \$50 million project.

Doster built the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs new outpatient clinic that opened recently in Guntersville and was awarded a contract to build another VA clinic in Carbondale, ILL. Doster also oversaw the construction of the Somerby at St. Vincent's One-Nineteen retirement community in Birmingham that offers healthcare services in a neighborhood setting that is similar to the amenities the new veterans' home will offer.

On Sept. 1, former Gov. Bob Riley announced the award of a \$15 million federal grant to help pay for the construction of the home.

“We can never do enough for our veterans. Every day we live in freedom is a day made possible by America's veterans,” said Riley. “They deserve the best we can give them, and this new veterans home will be the best in the country.”

Ken Rollins, vice chairman of the State Board of Veterans Affairs, said the home has “been a long time coming.”

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Commissioner's Corner - W. Clyde Marsh

Veterans' Programs, Services and Initiatives at the Forefront for State VA

Inauguration day was January 17, 2011 as Dr. Bentley was sworn in as our 53rd Governor. The ADVA is looking forward to working shoulder to shoulder with Gov. Bentley and the Executive Branch as we "care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and orphan." The famous quote also applies equally to our female warriors who are fighting our nation's battles.

Just over the horizon the new legislature is preparing to begin the Legislative Session on March 1, 2011, which should be a challenging, but productive time for our newly elected officials. With this new beginning, we will rededicate ourselves to caring for Alabama's 420,000 veterans.

In 2009, the ADVA received a notification letter from U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric K. Shinseki advising the department that a federal grant of matching funds was conditionally approved for the Col. Robert L. Howard State Veterans Home. As a consequence, we broke ground at the home's construction site in Pell City on January 3, 2011. The home's physical address will be a fitting tribute to those it will serve: 7054 Veterans Parkway, Pell City, Alabama 35125.

The ADVA is also waiting for the transfer of the property deed of the future site of the State Veterans Cemetery at Spanish Fort, Alabama. This will be the first state cemetery to be constructed in Alabama.

Walcott, Adams and Verneuille were hired as the architect and engineering firm to do all environmental, land preparation and cemetery master planning. If everything comes together in the April/May timeframe, we should be able to move forward expeditiously and commence work on this crucial cemetery project.

As stated in my 2011 Commissioner's Guidance, the department will do its very best with the personnel and funding resources available while providing outstanding services to our veterans and their dependents.

The following ADVA priorities remain at the forefront during the 2011 calendar and fiscal year:

- Construction of the Col. Robert L. Howard State Veterans Home.
- Construction of Alabama's first state veterans cemetery.

- Providing consistent and quality veterans services.
- Equipping Veterans Service Officers with the tools of their trade.
- Modernizing facilities and service delivery mechanisms.
- Training and outreach programs.

I want to congratulate the new members of the State Senate Veterans and Military Affairs Committee, and the newly formed House Military and Veterans Affairs Committee. These committees will play a crucial role in maintaining veterans' benefits and services as well as legislating new initiatives to improve these benefits.

The members of the Senate Veterans and Military Affairs Committee are: Sen. Bill Holtzclaw (R), Chairman; Sen. Ben Brooks (R), Sen. Quinton Ross (D), Ranking Minority Member; Sen. Gerald Dial (R); Sen. Jimmy Holley (R); Sen. Harri Anne Smith (I); Sen. Bryan Taylor (R); Sen. Tom Whatley (R); and Sen. Phil Williams (R).

The members of the House Military and Veterans Affairs Committee are: Rep. DuWayne Bridges (R), Chairman; Rep. Steve Clouse (R), Vice Chairman; Rep. Ralph Howard (D), Ranking Minority Member; Rep. Owen Drake (R); Rep. Alan Harper (D); Rep. Barry Moore (R); and Rep. Howard Sanderford (R).

My sense and hope is that our economy has turned the corner, which will spur state employment, growth and revenue. The key question is will it improve fast enough to prevent further budget cuts and proration.

If we are faced with additional cuts, it may affect veterans' services in the county offices which are already stretched very thin in many areas.

Do not fear or sweat the small things because we will find our way through these difficult times, and we will continue to get the job done to the best of our collective ability with what we have as we have done in the past. I encourage our department personnel to stay focused on the mission and don't let up on your commitment or passion.

I am proud of this agency and appreciate the work our dedicated professionals put forth to resolve the needs, issues and concerns of veterans in our great state and nation.

Around the State

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"We have had great support," said Rollins. "May God bless all those providing care for our veterans today and those who will provide the care in the new home."

St. Clair County Commission Chairman Stan Batemon said there is so much pride in the men and women who serve their country in uniform.

"I've yet to run into a former servicemember who does not know their service number," he said. "It swells me up with pride that our country is willing to invest and provide for those who served."

Batemon said veterans gave up their youth and their health, and now the country is giving back to them.

"What a great country," he said. "I want to say welcome home to all the veterans who will get to be welcomed home to this new veterans home."

Don Smith, executive director of the St. Clair County Economic Development Council, said even though the weather was stormy, it was a great day for Pell City, St. Clair County and Alabama.

"I am very proud to have this project here," he said. "It is one of the biggest projects to take place here."

Pell City Mayor Bill Hereford said they couldn't have picked a better name for the new VA home.

"Col. Robert Howard served his country with great distinction," he said.

Howard was born in Opelika and was awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroism during the Vietnam War. Howard is considered one of the nation's most decorated soldiers.

Marsh said Pell City is home to all the necessities of a great city, with great local support from the mayor and council, St. Clair County Commission and St. Clair County Economic Development Council.

"The Economic Development Council donated 27 acres for this site," he said. "The state of Alabama and the veterans thank you for your philanthropy and patriotism."

The home will feature more than 200,000 square feet including 254 private rooms, of which 174 are skilled-care beds and 80 are domiciliary/assisted living units. The home will have neighborhoods with two to three houses with 12-14 private rooms, personal bathrooms, and living and dining areas with a complete kitchen for serving meals.

Other features of the home include a community center, a barbershop and salon for both male and female veterans and a sports bar. The home will also have a "Hall of Honor" dedicated to the men and women who have served their nation in uniform.

The construction of the home began on Jan. 3. with a completion date of Spring 2012.



An artist rendering of the Colonel Robert L. Howard State Veterans Home to be built adjacent to Jeff State and a new St. Vincent's, St. Clair Hospital in Pell City.

Contractor Named to Design New State Veterans Cemetery

The Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs has selected Walcott Adams Verneuille Architects of Fairhope, Ala. to design the state veterans cemetery to be located in Spanish Fort.

Walcott was among 10 architectural and engineering firms that submitted proposals for the project.

"We continue to work with the federal Department of Veterans Affairs to be prepared for the next steps in establishing the first such facility in Alabama," said Sandy Speakman, general counsel for the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs.

In 2009, the ADVA applied for \$7 million in federal funds from the VA National Cemetery Administration to build the first state-operated veterans cemetery.

On May 22, former Gov. Bob Riley signed into law

a bill that established the cemetery and allows the ADVA to utilize federal grant money to pay for construction costs.

"The cemetery allows Alabama to take its rightful place among the top states that provide the very best support to its veterans, even after they have fought their last battle by laying them in final repose with all the honor, dignity and respect they rightly deserve," said ADVA Commissioner Clyde Marsh.

The contract with Walcott covers design services, environmental assessments, historical preservation services, contract administrative services and construction oversight.

Once the cemetery is built, it will serve the more than 71,000 Alabama Veterans and their families that live within 75 miles of the proposed site.

Around the State

Wreaths Across America Ceremony honors veterans during the holidays

Close to 800 holiday wreaths were laid on the gravestones in the Alabama National Cemetery on Dec. 11 as a part of the national Wreaths Across America program hosted by the Civil Air Patrol of Bessemer and the Blue Star Salute Foundation of Alabama.

The hosting organizations provided the fresh wreaths through generous public donations for the ceremony that began at 11 a.m. Participating national cemeteries across the country held ceremonies at the same time in an attempt to decorate each veteran's grave simultaneously.

"Today we show a national front of unity all across America as we remember the fallen, honor those who've served and teach our children the value of freedom," said Capt. Selene Vaught of the Bessemer Civil Air Patrol.

Before the individual wreaths were laid on the headstones, a short ceremony included the singing of the National Anthem, the playing of Taps and two flyovers. Representatives from each branch of the military placed wreaths on display stands at the front of the cemetery.

"The wreaths symbolize our honor for those who have served and are serving, and to their families who endure sacrifices every day on our behalf," Vaught said.



The Wreaths Across America Ceremony has become an annual event at the Alabama National Cemetery in Montevallo. The ceremony is held each year on the second Saturday in December.



Families and friends of veterans laid close to 800 wreaths during a Wreaths Across America Ceremony held at the Alabama National Cemetery in Montevallo on Dec. 11, 2010.

The ceremony's keynote speaker was Peggy Bourland of Trussville, who told the story of losing her husband while he was stationed in Haiti during the Jan. 2010 earthquake.

Bourland's story drew tears from many in the crowd, which was comprised of mostly family members of the veterans buried in the cemetery. With the help of the local ROTC, family members placed a wreath on each veteran's gravestone in the cemetery.

Charon Rivers, of Hoover, said she was glad people still remember the veterans during the holiday season. Rivers' son, Marine Lance Cpl. Thomas Rivers Jr., was the first servicemember buried in the Montevallo cemetery who was killed during combat in Afghanistan.

"I just think it's a wonderful way to honor our fallen heroes and veterans who've served our country," she said. "It's a beautiful way to remember them during this holiday time. It's wonderful to know that people continue to remember and don't forget."

"I never knew they did things like this," she added. "I guess you have to live it to know and unfortunately, I've had to live it."

John Walker, a member of the Blue Star Salute Foundation, said the wreath-laying ceremony in Montevallo was made possible with the help of the community, who sponsored the wreaths at \$15 a piece. He said the organization raised enough money through sponsorships to purchase wreaths this year with some left over to save for next year's endeavor.

Around the State



The General Richard Montgomery Chapter, Sons of the American Revolution, led the inaugural River Region Veterans Day Parade in Montgomery

Inaugural Veterans Day Parade Honors America's Finest

After a year of planning and preparation, November 11, 2010 marked the first time in recent memory that a Veterans Day Parade had been held in the Capital City.

Several thousand people lined Dexter Avenue for the parade that started at the State Capitol.

"It was about time for a celebration to take place," said George Gayle, 84, a World War II Veteran from Montgomery. He joined the Corps in 1944 and was a forward observer in a field artillery unit. His was a dangerous job, working on the front line to call in artillery fire. Gayle took in the parade from the sidewalk in front of the Capitol, sporting the yellow T-shirt he wore on a River Region Honor Flight trip.

"They should have been doing this all along," he said. "They've had a parade in Birmingham since before I was born. As patriotic as Montgomery is, it's really surprising this is the first parade."

The parade was held in Montgomery after the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs designated the city as a Veterans Day Regional Site, one of 41 nationwide. The other two cities designated in Alabama were Birmingham and Mobile.

The Veterans Day Parade became a reality after Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs Commissioner Clyde Marsh presented the idea to Montgomery Mayor Todd Strange. Mayor Strange readily

agreed to the parade and offered his and the city's support.

An F-16 flyover by the Alabama Air National Guard's 187th Fighter Wing signified the start of the parade. College, military and high school marching bands, veterans service organizations, patriotic floats, Boy Scouts of America and the Patriot Guard Riders were among parade participants.

Circuit Court Judge Charles Price of Montgomery served as the parade's grand marshal. Price, who is veteran, had advocated for a Veterans Day Parade in Montgomery for many years.

"I was very proud to serve my country, and I'm very appreciative to the men and women who are serving and have served in our military," Price said. "It's was a great honor for me to have been asked to serve as grand marshal."

After the parade, the Alabama National Guard's 151st Army Band performed a concert titled, "A Tribute to Freedom," at the Montgomery Riverfront Amphitheater. Ella Moorner and her husband, Melvin, a retired U.S. Air Force senior master sergeant attended the patriotic program. "This is a great way to spend Veterans Day," said Ella Moorner. "I can't wait until next year to do it all over again."

Montgomery Advertiser Reporter Marty Roney contributed to this story

Around the State

Dr. Robert Bentley is sworn in as Alabama's 53rd Governor

On a day that had low temperatures and rain in the forecast, a blue sky and warming sun provided the backdrop at the State Capitol for Dr. Robert Bentley's inauguration as he took the oath of office as Governor of Alabama on Jan. 17.

Gov. Bentley said creating jobs in the private sector is one of the most important things government can do in the state.

"We all want a good job and to be able to take care of our families," Bentley said. "We all want our state to be a great place to live and work. Working together, we're going to get through these tough times. We're going to put Alabama back to work. And I truly believe Alabama's best days are ahead."



National Association of Secretaries of State Recognizes Commissioner for Service



At a ceremony held at the Alabama State Capitol in Montgomery on Oct. 4, 2010, Secretary of State Beth Chapman presented the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS) Medallion Award to Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs Commissioner Clyde Marsh for his work on the Alabama Electronic Overseas Voting Advisory Committee.

As Secretary of State, Chapman is "Chief Elections Officer" for the state and is responsible for overseeing the state's election process.

In 2009, former Gov. Bob Riley appointed Marsh to the electronic overseas voting advisory committee to address the important issues confronting servicemembers who are deployed outside the United States. That same year, Chapman chaired the Military and Overseas Task Force which crafted legislation creating the committee.

"I cannot think of anyone in state government who is more supportive and dedicated to helping our military men and women of Alabama to vote electronically," said Chapman.

Chapman said Commissioner Marsh has been instrumental in conveying to State Legislators the need for a measure that would provide for electronic voting for military members who are deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, or who are permanently stationed at military installations overseas or in other states.

Despite the stall of legislation introduced in the 2009 legislative session because of an unrelated technical amendment, Chapman said the committee will get a bill passed that will allow Alabama voters outside the state to cast their ballots more effectively and efficiently.

The NASS Medallion Award Program recognizes individuals who demonstrate outstanding service and dedication to furthering the mission of the National Association of Secretaries of State within their home state. Award recipients must have an established record of promoting elections through voter education and service to state government relating to the duties of the Office of the Secretary of State.

Around the State

VA Employees Reach Milestone in State Service



Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs District One Manager Mike Beard (left) presents service pins to employees for their continuous service. From left, Cullman County Administrative Support Assistance Debbie Moore (25-Year Service Pin); Marshall County Veterans Service Officer Rhonda Tidmore (10-Year Service Pin); Franklin County Veterans Service Officer Thomas “Tinker” Malone (5-Year Service Pin); and Colbert County Administrative Support Assistant Peggy Marquart (5-Year Service Pin.) Beard made the presentations during the district’s annual training and holiday luncheon in Huntsville on Dec. 17.



Commissioner Clyde Marsh presents Sandy Speakman, ADVA General Counsel, with a letter acknowledging her 10 years of dedicated service to the State of Alabama. Ms. Speakman was appointed General Counsel of the state VA in 2008. She has also served as a State Assistant Attorney General and Deputy Legal Counsel for the State Personnel Department.



ADVA District Three Manager Marshall Smith was recognized for his 20 years of state service during an Oct. 1 ceremony held at the ADVA headquarters in Montgomery. Before his appointment as district manager for Alabama’s southern region, Smith served as the Houston County Veterans Service Officer and Assistant Claims Manager in the ADVA Claims Division.

Around the State



Kayla Kyle, ADVA's Scholarship Account Clerk, is joined by Assistant Commissioner Willie Moore (left) and Commissioner Clyde Marsh during the cake cutting ceremony that commemorated the department's 65th Anniversary.

Program Helps Youth With Special Needs

Lynda Jenkins, Mobile County Veterans Service Officer, was among community leaders to take part in the Foster Grandparent Program Appreciation event on Dec. 11 that recognized the program's 30 years of service for helping youth in the Mobile County area. The program offers grandparents the opportunity to volunteer their time to serve as role models for young men and women; provide services to children and youth with exceptional needs; tutor students to improve academic skills; motivate and instill good behavior; counsel children individually; help with reading abilities; and assist children with mental and physical disabilities. To learn more about the program, call (251) 574-6488.



Lynda Jenkins, Mobile County VSO and retired Army Sgt. First Class (left), led the Pledge of Allegiance at the Mobile County Foster Grandparents Program Appreciation Ceremony that honored the program's volunteers.

Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs' 65th Anniversary

For over six decades the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs has provided services, benefits and assistance to those who have worn our nation's uniform, keeping the promise made by President Abraham Lincoln: "To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and orphan."

On Oct. 1, 2010, the ADVA celebrated the department's 65th Anniversary at a ceremony held in Montgomery.

Commissioner Clyde Marsh acknowledged the department's history and continued commitment to serving veterans that began by an Act passed by the State Legislature on October 1, 1945.

"The organization and structure of the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs has changed over the years, but its mission of providing the best care, benefits and services to Alabama Veterans has remained constant," Marsh said.

The ADVA is a service oriented state agency that assist veterans with VA pension and compensation claims services, providing dependents' scholarship benefits, and offering long-term health care at the state veterans' homes.

First evidence of the state's obligation to render services to veterans is contained in an Act of 1927 when the office of State Service Commissioner was established. Under the legislation, the State Service Commissioner was charged "to aid all residents of the State of Alabama who served in any war which the United States has been engaged."

In 1931, an Amendment to this legislation authorized an expansion of the office of State Service Commissioner to include one Assistant State Service Commissioner, two State Field Service Commissioners, and a Secretary to the State Service Commissioner. This organization of the Service Commission continued until the Department of Veterans Affairs was created by the 1945 Legislature.

News to Use

VA Publishes Final Regulation to Aid Veterans Exposed to Agent Orange in Korea

Veterans exposed to herbicides while serving along the demilitarized zone (DMZ) in Korea will have an easier path to access quality health care presumed to be related to Agent Orange.

Under the final regulation published Jan. 25 in the Federal Register, VA will presume herbicide exposure for any veteran who served between April 1, 1968, and Aug. 31, 1971, in a unit determined by VA and the Department of Defense (DoD) to have operated in an area in or near the Korean DMZ in which herbicides were applied.

Previously, VA recognized that Agent Orange exposure could only be conceded to veterans who served in certain units along the Korean DMZ between April 1968 and July 1969.

In practical terms, eligible veterans who have specific illnesses VA presumes to be associated with herbicide exposure do not have to prove an association between their illness and their military service. This "presumption" simplifies and speeds up the application process for benefits and ensures that veterans receive the benefits they deserve.

VA encourages veterans with covered service in Korea who have medical conditions that may be related to Agent Orange to submit their applications for access to VA health care and compensation as soon as possible so the agency can begin processing their claims.

VA Adds Chat Feature to Online Application for Health Benefits

Veterans will find it easier and faster to apply for their health care benefits now that the Department of Veterans Affairs has enhanced and streamlined its online Form 10-10EZ, "Application for Health Benefits."

"VA is committed to tapping into the best that technology has to offer to ensure Veterans receive the benefits they have earned," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "We continue to look for new ways to improve access to care and benefits and engage veterans."

This revised online application now features a chat function which will allow veterans to receive live assistance while they are filling out the form. Additional enhancements to the process include simplifications of questions relating to military service in Southeast Asia during the Gulf and in the Vietnam wars. Several additional minor enhancements make the application easier and faster for Veterans to complete.

The 10-10EZ application is divided into six different sets of information, including personal information, insurance information, employment, military service, and financial assessment. Since November 2000, nearly 4000 veterans have already used the online 10-10EZ to start receiving health care benefits from VA.

Future enhancements to the online application will include a 10-10EZR Health Benefits Renewal Form for Veterans to update their personal information and special 10-10EZ designed specifically for demobilizing military service members.

Veterans may complete or download the 10-10EZ form at the VA health eligibility Web site at www.1010ez.med.va.gov/sec/vha/1010ez.

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News to Use

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The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has founded a National Call Center for Homeless Veterans to ensure that homeless veterans, or veterans at-risk for homelessness have free, 24/7 access to trained counselors. The hotline is intended to assist homeless veterans and their families, VA Medical Centers, federal, state and local partners, community agencies, service providers and others in the community. To be connected with a trained VA staff member, call 1-877-4AID VET (877-424-3838).

Additional help for veterans is offered through the VA Health Care and Re-entry Veterans (HCRV) Program. The program is designed to address the community re-entry needs of incarcerated veterans. HCRV's goals are to prevent homelessness, reduce the impact of medical, psychiatric, and substance abuse problems upon community re-adjustment, and decrease the likelihood of re-incarceration for those leaving prison.

Veteran Justice Outreach Initiative

The purpose of the Veteran Justice Outreach Initiative (VJO) initiative is to avoid the unnecessary criminalization of mental illness and extended incarceration among veterans by ensuring that eligible justice-involved veterans have timely access to VHA mental health and substance abuse services when clinically indicated, and other VA services and benefits as appropriate.

VA is requiring justice-focused activity at the medical center level. VA Medical Centers have been strongly

encouraged to develop working relationships with the court system and local law enforcement and must now provide outreach to justice-involved veterans in the communities they serve.

Each VA medical center has been asked to designate a facility-based Veterans' Justice Outreach Specialist, responsible for direct outreach, assessment, and case management for justice-involved veterans in local courts and jails, and liaison with local justice system partners. The national justice outreach number is (202) 461-7311.

VA National Update

Improvements to Post 9/11 GI Bill

To bring the educational benefits of the Post-9/11 GI Bill closer to more veterans and servicemembers, the President signed legislation on Jan. 4 that streamlines the 18-month-old education program administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

“Since the first GI Bill in 1944, this unique educational program has adapted to the needs of America’s veterans, active-duty personnel, reservists and Guardsmen,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “Like its forerunners, the Post-9/11 GI Bill is growing to ensure the men and women who serve this nation in uniform receive valuable education benefits from a grateful nation.”

“On behalf of veterans and the many who serve them at VA, we would like to thank the President for his support, as well as members of Congress and our veterans service organization partners for helping make this bill a reality,” Shinseki added.

Among the provisions of the legislation are:

- Paying for on-the-job training, some flight training; apprenticeship training and correspondence courses;
- Allowing reservists and Guardsmen to have their time supporting emergencies called by their state governors credited to the time needed to qualify for educational benefits;
- Providing one half of the national average for the program’s housing allowance to students enrolled in distance learning;
- Pro-rating the housing allowance to exclude payments when students are not in class;
- Allowing students on active duty to receive the stipend for books and supplies;
- Allowing people eligible for the Post-9/11 GI Bill, but participating in VA’s Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) benefits to choose between the GI Bill’s housing allowance or VR&E’s subsistence allowance;
- Permitting reimbursement for more than one “license and certification” test;
- Reimbursing fees to take national admission tests, such as SAT, ACT, GMAT and LSAT;
- Establishing a national cap of \$17,500 annually for tuition and fees in a private or a foreign school, not including contributions by education institutions under the “Yellow Ribbon” program.

By the end of December 2010, VA issued nearly \$7.2 billion in tuition, housing, and stipends for more than 425,000 veterans or eligible family members pursuing higher education under the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Information about the provisions is available at www.gibill.va.gov.



Department of Defense Announces Vietnam War 50th Anniversary Commemoration Program

The Department of Defense announced Jan. 14 its program to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War. The program will:

- Thank and honor veterans of the Vietnam War, including personnel who were held as prisoners of war or listed as missing in action, for their service and sacrifice on behalf of the United States and to thank and honor the families of these veterans.
- Highlight the service of the armed forces during the Vietnam War and the contributions of federal agencies and governmental and non-governmental organizations that served with, or in support of, the armed forces.
- Pay tribute to the contributions made on the home front by the people of the United States during the Vietnam War.
- Recognize the contributions and sacrifices made by the allies of the United States during the Vietnam War.

DoD representatives will coordinate with other federal agencies, veteran groups, state, local government and non-government organizations for their input in Vietnam War commemoration activities.

For more information, call 877-387-9951, or visit the official website at www.vietnamwar50th.com.

VA National Update



Presidential Initiative Supports Military Families

President Barack Obama, First Lady Michelle Obama, and Dr. Jill Biden have put forward 50 commitments by federal agencies responding to the President's directive to establish a coordinated and comprehensive Federal approach to supporting military families.

The result is an effort led by the National Security Staff and Domestic Policy Council responding to the Presidential Study Directive-9 calling on all Cabinet Secretaries and other agency heads to find better ways to provide military families with the support they deserve. The unified Federal Government approach will help ensure:

- The U.S. military recruits and retains America's best, allowing it to maintain the high standards which have become a hallmark of our armed forces.
- Service members can maintain both strong families and a high state of readiness;
- Family members can live fulfilling lives while supporting

their service members; and

- The American people better understand and appreciate the experience, strength, and commitment of those who serve and sacrifice on their behalf.

The Federal Government has identified four strategic priorities that address the primary challenges facing our military families:

1. Enhance the well-being and psychological health of the military family;
2. Ensure excellence in military children's education and their development.
3. Develop career and educational opportunities for military spouses.
4. Increase child care availability and quality for the armed forces.

Partnerships will expand the capacity and quality of services in a fiscally responsible way.

Health and Human Services (HHS) has partnered with the Department of Defense (DoD) to best confront suicide trends within military family and Veteran populations, to normalize preventive training and peer-

level counseling to best treat psychological needs of our military families, and expand access and quality of child care resources.

Housing and Urban Development, Veterans Affairs, Labor and HHS have teamed to achieve the aggressive goal of unqualified elimination of homelessness by 2015.

DoD, Labor, Commerce, and the Small Business Administration are committed to collaboratively engaging corporate America and expanding career opportunities for military spouses.

Department of Agriculture (USDA) will expand its cooperation with the military by co-hosting the Family Resilience Summit in 2011 with DoD and maximizing USDA's reach to military communities across rural America through its cooperative extension network.

This effort elevates the need for more awareness on the challenges facing military families and in turn generates more

effective use of government resources across society.

The Department of Education will make supporting military families one of its supplemental priorities for its discretionary grant programs. This priority, when applied, will, for the first time ever, favor grant applications to meet the needs of military students.

HHS is promoting awareness across its service provider networks, the media industry, and professional medical organizations on military culture and psychological health of our service members, their spouses and their children.

And the Treasury Department is establishing an Office of Service Member Affairs, to help educate and protect military families from predatory lending and harmful consumer practices.

The initiative also allows military families to voice their concerns and opinions, their unique challenges, and input for federal programs and policies.