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NEWS BRIEFS

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New Year Brings Another Travel Reimbursement Increase to Eligible Veterans

Service-disabled and low-income veterans who are reimbursed for travel expenses while receiving care at Department of Veterans Affairs facilities will see an increase in their payments beginning January 9.

A recently passed law allows VA to cut the amount it must withhold from their mileage reimbursement. The deductible amount will be \$3 for each one-way trip and \$6 for each round trip – with a cap of \$18 each calendar year, or six one-way trips, or three round trips, whichever comes first.

The previous deductible was \$7.77 for a one-way trip, and \$15.54 for round trips, with a cap of \$46.62 for a calendar year. In November, the VA increased the mileage reimbursement rate from 28.5 cents to 41.5 cents a mile.

Service-disabled and low-income veterans are eligible to be reimbursed by VA for the travel costs of receiving health care or counseling at VA facilities. Veterans traveling for Compensation and Pension examinations also qualify for mileage reimbursement. VA can waive deductibles if they cause financial hardship.

VA Ramps Up Job Search for Injured Veterans

The VA has announced that it intends to increase the number of disabled veterans who obtain employment in its workforce. In 2008, thirty-two percent of VA employees were veterans – the second highest ranking among cabinet departments after the Department of Defense – and nearly 8 percent of VA employees were service-connected disabled veterans.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs James Peake said the VA's Veterans Employment Coordination Service will contact all severely injured veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to determine their interest in, and qualification for, VA jobs.

By the end of 2008, the VA had identified 2,300 severely injured veterans of those wars. Some 600 of those veterans expressed interest in VA employment. Veterans interested in a job opportunity with the federal VA can call the Region 6 Veterans Employment Coordination Service center at (706) 729-5765.

Donate Part of Income Tax Refund to Veterans' Homes

Anyone filing an Alabama State Income Tax who is receiving a refund may donate as little as \$1 or more for the State Veterans' Home Program.

This State tax refund contribution is used to provide the broadest scope of medical and supporting services which is possible to our deserving veterans who are residents in the three State Veterans' Homes which are located in Huntsville, Alexander City and Bay Minette.

Your contributions will be greatly appreciated for this worthy cause.

Importance of Estate Planning

Thoughtful planning is essential to settling a veteran's estate in an orderly manner in the event of death. Among the many suggested actions one should take to ensure that their estate planning is complete is to ensure that beneficiaries are current on all commercial and government policies; have a burial plan, and ensure key family and military service documents are available.

How to Obtain VA Burial Flags

Honorably discharged veterans are entitled to a free VA burial flag. The funeral director, as part of the services, should make the necessary arrangements for the family on behalf of the veteran.

The flag may be used to cover the casket and it is presented to the family as a keepsake. Our office can also provide information on the procedure for obtaining a flag for a deceased veteran.

Ad Valorem Tax Exemptions are Allowed for Specially Adapted Veteran Homes

The home of any veteran which is or was acquired under the provisions of the federal law which governs specially adapted veteran housing grants can be exempt from Alabama's Ad Valorem taxes as long as the house is owned and occupied as a home by the veteran or his unremarried widow.

For more information, please contact your local county tax office.