

E-VETS

The monthly online newsletter serving Texas veterans

President signs improvements to Post-9/11 GI Bill

By Rachel Howell, Austin Texas Veterans Commission

On Tuesday, Jan. 4, 2011, President Barack Obama signed the Post-9/11 Veterans Education Assistance Improvements Act of 2010 into law. This bill affects the Post-9/11 GI Bill so that more Veterans and service members will qualify for The 18-month-old education program administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

“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 in a VA press release. “Like its forbearers, 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.”

Below is a partial list of updates. For a more complete list, visit http://www.gibill.va.gov/post-911/post-911-gi-bill-summary/Post911_changes.html

Effective August 1, 2009, but not payable until October 1, 2011

- Certain National Guard members mobilized on Title 32 orders on-or-after September 11, 2001 are now eligible for the Post-9/11 GI Bill and any qualifying Title 32 mobilization may be used to increase your percentage of eligibility.

Effective August 1, 2011

- The Post-9/11 GI Bill will now pay all public school tuition and fees; this includes graduate training, etc.
- For students attending private institutions of higher learning or foreign schools, the tuition and fee reimbursement is capped at the lesser of net out-of-pocket cost or \$17,500

- annually - however the Yellow Ribbon Program still exists.
- Reimbursement is now available for multiple Licensing and Certification Tests.
- Reimbursement is now available for fees paid to take national examinations used for admission to an institution of higher learning (e.g. SAT, LSAT, ACT, GMAT, etc).
- Vocational Rehabilitation participants may now receive the higher housing allowance offered by the Post-9/11 GI Bill if otherwise eligible for the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

Effective October 1, 2011

- Non-college degree programs, on-the-job training, and flight training programs are now covered under the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

Impact of changes to Texas Veterans:

- Limits payment of tuition and fees at private schools to \$17,500 per academic year. Previously in Texas, the maximum amount was \$1,549 per credit hour for tuition and \$12,130 in fees per term.
- Eliminates payment of benefits between terms when the period exceeds four weeks.
- Requires fulltime enrollment for payment of the full amount of the monthly housing stipend. Monthly payments are prorated based on the number of hours of enrollment. Previously, students only had to be enrolled for greater than half-time to receive the full monthly housing stipend.

For more information about the improvements to the Post-9-11 GI Bill, contact the Texas Veterans Commission Education Program, call toll-free (877) 898-3833 or email vetsed@tvc.state.tx.us.



TEXAS VETERANS COMMISSION

Please send suggestions or comments pertaining to this newsletter to:
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Our Veteran Online Partners

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www.agd.state.tx.us

Texas Veterans Commission
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Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
www.theccb.state.tx.us

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WHAT'S INSIDE?

Millions in unclaimed cash awaits Veterans 2
Cognitive rehabilitation therapy proving to help soldiers with PTSD and TBI 2
VA Urges Veterans to Sign Up for Direct Deposits 2

Update on Cost-of-Living Adjustment for Veterans Compensation and Pension Benefits in 2011 3
Department of Labor launches Veterans Hiring Toolkit for employers .. 3
Veteran News around the Web..... 3
Free Veterans Outreach, Yellow Ribbon & More! 4

Millions in unclaimed cash awaits Veterans

By Bonnie Fletcher, Austin Texas Veterans Commission

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) reports Veterans and their family members may be entitled to receive unclaimed insurance funds totaling 33 million dollars. There are currently over 25 million people enrolled in the Veterans Affairs Insurance Program and these unclaimed funds have been accumulating since 1917 when the program first began.

The unclaimed insurance funds are owed to individuals who are current or former policy owners and beneficiaries. These unpaid funds, include death awards, dividend checks, and premium funds that have not been issued due to individuals not knowing they are eligible and the VA not being able to locate the Veterans or their families.



Most unclaimed funds were returned to the VA post office after the money could not be delivered.

The VA will continue to hold all funds until they are claimed. The majority of these payments have been held for years with the bulk of unclaimed funds being for World War II Veterans.

If you or someone you know might be eligible for these funds please visit: <https://insurance.va.gov/liability/ufsearch.htm>. The site contains a database of all individuals

who are owed funds and instructions for claiming these monies.

The unclaimed funds database does not include SGLI and VGLI policies for those in service from 1965 to the present. Please do not use this search feature if you are a SGLI or VGLI policyholder.

Cognitive rehabilitation therapy proving to help soldiers with PTSD and TBI

By Bonnie Fletcher, Austin Texas Veterans Commission

As the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan continue, increasing numbers of service members are coming home with invisible wounds. Though we mostly hear overwhelming statistics about PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) is another injury affecting returning service members.

TBI, which is trauma to the brain caused by sudden force to the head, is the “signature wound” of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and has become one of the most common wounds suffered in combat. Service members usually walk away from an explosion or sudden blow to the head without any obvious injuries. TBI is not always apparent at first but can have a lingering affect that can last a lifetime

if not treated.

Since 2000, 178,786 soldiers have experienced a traumatic brain injury in the military, according to a Congressional Research Service report. (<http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RS22452.pdf>)

There are currently helpful treatments that offer service members coping mechanisms. One of the tools that soldiers are utilizing is cognitive rehabilitation therapy.

Read or listen to National Public Radio’s (NPR) coverage of this treatment here: <http://www.npr.org/series/127402851/brain-wars-how-the-military-is-failing-its-wounded>

VA Urges Veterans to Sign Up for Direct Deposits Treasury Publishes Final Regulation to Phase Out Paper Checks by 2013

Department of Veterans Affairs Press Release

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. Officials at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) urge Veterans to sign up for electronic payment of their benefits.

“Receiving VA benefits electronically will increase the security, convenience and reliability of these vital payments,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “VA encourages Veterans who are now receiving their benefits in paper checks to set up direct deposits before the deadline.”

On March 1, 2013, 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. Called the Direct Express card, it is issued by Comerica Bank as the financial agent of the U.S. Treasury.

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.

Anyone already receiving federal benefit payments electronically will be unaffected by the changes. To learn more about the federal government’s switch to direct deposit – or to change VA benefits to direct deposit -- visit www.GoDirect.org. Information about the federal government’s “Go Direct” campaign is also available at 1-800-333-1795.

NEWS AROUND THE COUNTRY

Update on Cost-of-Living Adjustment for Veterans Compensation and Pension Benefits in 2011 COLA Tied to Social Security and Consumer Price Index

Department of Veterans Affairs Press Release

WASHINGTON – The Social Security Administration has announced that no cost-of-living adjustments will be made to Social Security benefits in 2011 because the consumer price index has not risen since 2008 when the last Social Security increase

occurred.

Like recipients of Social Security and other federal benefits, Veterans, their families and survivors will also not see a cost-of-living adjustment in 2011 to their compensation and pension benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Under federal law, the cost-of-living

adjustments to VA's compensation and pension rates are the same percentage as for Social Security benefits.

VA provides compensation and pension benefits to about four million Veterans and beneficiaries. For more information about VA benefits, go to www.TexasVeteransCommission.org.

Department of Labor launches Veterans Hiring Toolkit for employers

Department of Labor Press Release

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Labor today announced the availability of a new online toolkit to guide employers through the process for hiring veterans. The free toolkit is designed to assist and educate employers who have made the proactive decision to include veterans and wounded warriors in their recruitment and hiring initiatives.

“Many employers have told us that they are interested in developing or enhancing a veterans hiring initiative for their company, but that they don't know where to begin,” said Ray Jefferson, assistant secretary for the department's Veterans' Employment and Training Service. “This toolkit was created with these employers in mind. It's designed to simplify the process and put valuable, vetted resources at the employer's fingertips.”

Developed as part of the department's “America's Heroes at Work” initiative,

the Veterans Hiring Toolkit features a straightforward six-step process pinpointing helpful tools for a business to design a veterans hiring initiative. These steps include creating an educated and welcoming environment for veteran employees; actively recruiting veterans, wounded warriors and military spouses; learning how to accommodate qualified veterans and wounded warriors in the workplace; and promoting an inclusive workplace to help retain veteran employees. The toolkit also helps employers navigate the plethora of resources for hiring veterans available to them.

“Disabled veterans, including those experiencing the ‘invisible’ wounds of war like traumatic brain injury and combat stress, are an important segment of the disability population that needs our support when transitioning to civilian employment,” said Kathleen Martinez, assistant secretary for the department's Office of Disability

Employment Policy.

The final section of the toolkit features a quick reference list of reputable online resources to help users find and welcome talented and skilled veterans into their companies. Examples include links to veterans employment service organizations, places to receive consultations on workplace accommodations and answers to common employer questions about hiring veterans and wounded warriors. Whether users are looking to create a veterans hiring program from scratch or retool existing efforts, the toolkit can help them design and implement a customized initiative.

To access the toolkit, visit <http://www.AmericasHeroesAtWork.gov/forEmployers/HiringToolkit>.

Veteran news around the web

Last surviving World War I Veteran will celebrate his 110th Birthday in Feb. Read more about his incredible life:

<http://pershingslastpatriot.com/frank/>

VA increases verification of veteran-owned businesses (Washington Technology)

<http://washingtontechnology.com/articles/2011/01/04/va-verify-veteran-owned-small-businesses.aspx>

Wounded Iraq veteran, family, presented with a new home (Dallas Morning News)

http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/news/localnews/stories/DN-homegame_31met.ART.State.Edition1.1477435.html

All who served and live in Texas are now Texas Veterans (VLB Website)

http://www.glo.texas.gov/glo_news/press_releases/2010/DECEMBER/Veterans-benefits.html



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Veterans Outreach

The Wichita County Service Office has teamed up with Eddie Hill's Fun Cycle to host a Veterans Outreach on January 22, 2011 from 10 am-2 pm.

Also in attendance will be representatives from the Department of Veterans Affairs, Social Security, TVLB, TVC, TWC, Legal Aid of Northwest Texas and local area service organizations.

Be sure to bring your DD214 and/or VA paper work and letter.

Texas Veterans Commission Fund for Veterans' Assistance



The Fund for Veterans' Assistance is pleased to announce the next solicitation for funding will be available around March 1, 2010.

FAQ <http://www.tvc.state.tx.us/about/fund-for-veterans-assistance> or email grants@tvc.state.tx.us



TEXAS VETERANS COMMISSION

Claims Assistance

Veterans Education

Employment Services

Fund for Veterans' Assistance