

# NEWSLETTER

January – February 2007

Disabled American Veterans

Blind Veterans National Chapter

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**WELCOME ABOARD**

**BILL CONSTANTINE**

**TAPS**

**William Thomas  
Charles O'Bradén  
Charles Wooldridge**

**May They Rest in Peace**

## CHAPLAIN

Please let the Blind Chapter Chaplain know if you are sick, hospitalized or you know of one of our members who is. Contact Reverend Anthony Martino at 25016 87th Street, Unit 2, Salem Wisconsin 53168. His phone number is 847 736 2111 and his email address is [Deaconmart@wi.rr.com](mailto:Deaconmart@wi.rr.com).

Chaplain Tony maintains a prayer list. Please contact him if you wish to have a name placed on the prayer list.

## **PRESIDENT BUSH SIGNS CRAIG'S VETERANS BILL INTO LAW**

***\$3.2 billion measure will improve health delivery, overturns historic ban on attorneys, and expands benefits***

December 24, 2006

Washington , DC ) On Friday President George Bush signed into law a \$3.2 billion comprehensive benefits and health care bill for veterans sponsored by U.S. Senator Larry Craig, the outgoing chairman of the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs.

**"I hope veterans will rest a little easier this Christmas knowing that Congress did its job. We passed legislation that will enable this country to move forward with major construction projects for veterans and also will make some significant changes that will benefit veterans and their loved ones for generations to come,"** said Sen. Craig

The bill the President signed is [S. 3421, the Veterans Benefits, Healthcare, and Information Technology Act of 2006](#).

Among its many provisions, the new law partially overturns a policy dating back to the Civil War era that has prohibited veterans from hiring attorneys to help them seek veterans' benefits until they have spent months (sometimes years) exhausting the administrative process. The original policy came during a time when lawyers were often self trained and notoriously unscrupulous. As signed into law, this bill will now allow veterans or other VA claimants to hire attorneys during VA's appeal process.

**"The old law may have made sense in 1866, but 140 years later it was time to reexamine that outdated policy.**

**Veterans will still have the option of utilizing the representation services provided without charge by many veterans organizations, but in addition they will have the option of hiring an attorney if they so choose,"** Craig said.

The legislation will also require VA to establish an Office of Rural Health. **"For rural states like [Idaho](#) , the addition of this office should ensure that VA continues to focus on the needs and challenges of veterans who live in outlying areas,"** Craig said.

The new law should also help rural states by allowing VA to create a pilot program which makes non-VA facilities (such as private nursing homes or community hospitals) eligible for state veterans' home per diem payments.

**"This change will allow veterans to stay closer to home and loved ones. I think that's important,"** Craig said.

Among its many provisions, the bill adds \$65 million to increase the number of clinicians treating [post traumatic stress disorder](#) (PTSD) and \$2 million for additional [blind rehabilitation](#) specialists and increases the number of facilities where the specialists will be located. It also authorizes VA to designate six Parkinson's Disease Research, Education, and Clinical Centers of Excellence, and at least two Multiple Centers of Excellence.

The bill contains provisions that will provide VA with additional tools to help it contract with veteran and disabled veteran-owned small businesses.

**"We want to make sure that veterans who do business with VA get high priority,"** Craig said.

The new veterans' law authorizes the replacement of the VA facilities in New Orleans , which were wiped out during Hurricane Katrina, and move forward with new hospital projects in Denver , Las Vegas , and Orlando .

The bill also includes a provision sought by Sen. Craig which requires the removal of the remains of a double murderer ( Russell Wayne Wagner ) from Arlington National Cemetery . Wagner brutally murdered Daniel Davis, 84, and Wilda Davis, 80, in Maryland in 1994. Their son, [Vernon Davis](#) , is a veteran and he had sought help from Sen. Craig and Maryland Senator Barbara Mikulski to have his parents' killer removed from that hallowed ground.

The new law will also enable the spouse or child of a servicemember who is hospitalized or receiving outpatient medical care to begin receiving financial help through VA for their education. Sen. Craig crafted that portion of the legislation earlier this year after meeting with [Army Sgt. Jeff Mittman](#) who was blinded during an attack in Iraq .

The new law will also enable tribal organizations to obtain grants from VA to help them establish, expand, or improve veterans' cemeteries on trust lands.

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## **DAV Washington Update Veterans' Disability Panel Rejects Lump-Sum Option**

The Veterans' Disability Benefits Commission has rejected a proposal that the Department of Veterans Affairs begin offering some veterans a lump-sum payment instead of lifetime monthly compensation.

The 13-member commission voted unanimously against considering lump-sum payments for disability compensation after hearing arguments against the idea from DAV National Legislative Director Joseph A. Violante, who testified on behalf of more than a dozen military and veterans service organizations.

The commission, created by Congress in 2004, is conducting a comprehensive review of veterans disability benefits and is scheduled to deliver its recommendations to lawmakers in the fall of 2007.

### **Vets Urged to Wear Medals on Patriotic Holidays**

The VA is urging America's veterans to wear the medals they earned during military service on Veterans Day, Memorial Day and Independence Day.

The Veterans Pride Initiative is designed to remind Americans of the pride and honor in the hearts of those who have served, said Secretary of Veterans Affairs R. James Nicholson.

The VA has information about the campaign on its Web page,

[www.va.gov/veteranspride](http://www.va.gov/veteranspride), where veterans also can obtain information about how to replace mislaid medals and learn how to confirm the decorations they are entitled to wear.

## **Jesse Brown Scholarship Nominations**

Applications for the 2007 Jesse Brown Memorial Youth Scholarship Program will be accepted between September 1, 2006 and February 27, 2007.

Scholarships can be awarded to any volunteer who is age 21 or younger and has volunteered for a minimum of 100 hours at a VA medical center during the previous calendar year. All volunteer hours must be credited to the Disabled American Veterans. Immediate family members of the DAV national organization are eligible to receive a scholarship.

Nominations may be submitted by the Voluntary Service Program Manager at the VA medical center, DAV Department Commander or the student may complete a self-nomination form which is available on-line. If you are submitting your own nomination, please include an essay (750 words or less) discussing "What volunteering at a VA medical center means to you."

Complete information and nomination forms can be accessed on [www.davy.org/volunteers/jesse\\_brown\\_scholarship.html](http://www.davy.org/volunteers/jesse_brown_scholarship.html); or write to: Disabled American Veterans, National Service and Legislative Headquarters, Voluntary Services Department, 807 Maine Avenue, S.W., Washington, DC 20024.

## From the Armed Forces News Issue

### **VA Facilitates Half-price Prescriptions**

The Department of Veterans Affairs is helping some veterans get generic prescriptions for half the VA price. Veterans in health care priority categories 4 through 8 normally must make an \$8 co-pay for drugs from the VA that might be available at the \$4 rate being offered by Wal-Mart Stores Inc., and Target Corp. VA deputy undersecretary William Feeley has told VA providers they can write prescriptions that can be filled at any private-sector pharmacy. They cannot transfer the veterans' prescriptions directly to a private-sector pharmacy, but they can write new prescriptions if they meet state requirements and cancel existing VA prescriptions.

For the \$4 drugs available at Wal-Mart, visit

<http://i.walmart.com/i/if/hmp/fusion/generidruglist.pdf> , and for the Target drugs

go to

[http://sites.target.com/images/pharmacy/pharmacy\\_4dollar\\_program\\_list.pdf](http://sites.target.com/images/pharmacy/pharmacy_4dollar_program_list.pdf).

## CHAT ROOM

I have a new web site I have created and is run by Veterans with sight lost and we also have classroom and a office plus Chat and conference room I have develop, our web maser is a blind Vet also I would like you if possible to take a look at this sit and put it in the newsletter, soon I will have the contact information and Email sign up list below is the information you need. Jerry Hogan

Jerry Hogan

8438 Braun Path

San Antonio, TX 78254

Email: [jerryhogan5@earthlink.net](mailto:jerryhogan5@earthlink.net)

\*\*\*Editor's note: Jerry Hogan is a member of the BVNC and requested this information be put in our newsletter.

### **Coming Soon to My HealtheVet.**

Beginning winter 2006, My HealtheVet will release features and functions for veterans to view copies of their VA health records online. More and more sections of the VA health record will be made available online as electronic copies over the next year. These parts of your VA health information will be added to your Personal Health Record, along with whatever information you enter yourself.

Health Records can be complicated to display and to understand. My HealtheVet is working with designers, professionals and veterans to make sure that the Personal Health Record is usable-that veterans will be able to understand the information it contains.

We are working hard to prepare our systems to gather your health information from all VA Medical Centers. This information will be added as your electronic copy to your Personal Health Record for access whenever and wherever you have web access.

Here is what you need to know about your VA health records and you're my HealtheVet Personal Health Record.

The first step: Security. My HealtheVet and the VA take the security and privacy

of your health records very seriously. We know that veterans want to be sure that they are the only ones who can view their health records. Veterans will only be able to access their Personal Health Record only after they have completed a process called "In-Person Authentication."

In-Person Authentication can only be done at a VA Medical Center. Veterans must show up in person, present a valid form of identification, view an instructional video, and sign an agreement. Once an authorized VA employee has verified the identity of the veteran, My HealtheVet will allow this new access to their Personal Health Record.

### **Piece by Piece.**

In December 2006, veterans nationwide will be able to complete In-Person Authentication, and then be able to view additional prescription information online. More parts of the Personal Health Record will become available over time. When My HealtheVet launches delegation functionality in 2007 you will also be able to choose who else will be able to view or manage your Personal Health Record.

Each part of the Personal Health Record will undergo extensive testing and design. Veterans across the country will be able to view records from any Medical Center where they receive treatment.

### **Why Piece by Piece?**

My HealtheVet had two choices: to select one or two regions at a time to offer the entire Personal Health Record, or to offer smaller pieces of the Record to all

veterans at the same time. My HealtheVet chose to offer the smaller pieces to all veterans rather than have veterans wait and not be able to view any part of their Records until we reach their region.

Stay Tuned

Stay tuned to My HealtheVet throughout 2007 for more Personal Health Record news!

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### **Recent VA News Releases**

Secretary Nicholson: VA Reaches Out to Veterans and Spouses "Aid and Attendance" an Under-Used Benefit  
WASHINGTON (Dec. 19, 2006) - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is reaching out to inform wartime veterans and surviving spouses of deceased wartime veterans about an under-used, special monthly pension benefit called Aid and Attendance.

"Veterans have earned this benefit by their service to our nation," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson. "We want to ensure that every veteran or surviving spouse who qualifies has the chance to apply."

Although this is not a new program, not everyone is aware of his or her potential eligibility. The Aid and Attendance pension benefit may be available to wartime veterans and surviving spouses who have in-home care or who live in nursing-homes or assisted-living facilities.

Many elderly veterans and surviving

spouses whose incomes are above the congressionally mandated legal limit for a VA pension may still be eligible for the special monthly Aid and Attendance benefit if they have large medical expenses, including nursing home expenses, for which they do not receive reimbursement.

To qualify, claimants must be incapable of self support and in need of regular personal assistance.

The basic criteria for the Aid and Attendance benefit include the inability to feed oneself, to dress and undress without assistance, or to take care of one's own bodily needs. People who are bedridden or need help to adjust special prosthetic or orthopedic devices may also be eligible, as well as those who have a physical or mental injury or illness that requires regular assistance to protect them from hazards or dangers in their daily environment.

For a wartime veteran or surviving spouse to qualify for this special monthly pension, the veteran must have served at least 90 days of active military service, one day of which was during a period of war, and be discharged under conditions other than dishonorable.

Wartime veterans who entered active duty on or after September 8, 1980, (October 16, 1981, for officers) must have completed at least 24 continuous months of military service or the period for which they were ordered to active duty.

If all requirements are met, VA

determines eligibility for the Aid and Attendance benefit by adjusting for unreimbursed medical expenses from the veteran's or surviving spouse's total household income. If the remaining income amount falls below the annual income threshold for the Aid and Attendance benefit, VA pays the difference between the claimant's household income and the Aid and Attendance threshold.

The Aid and Attendance income threshold for a veteran without dependents is now \$18,234 annually. The threshold increases to \$21,615 if a veteran has one dependent, and by \$1,866 for each additional dependent. The annual Aid and Attendance threshold for a surviving spouse alone is \$11,715. This threshold increases to \$13,976 if there is one dependent child, and by \$1,866 for each additional child.

Additional information and assistance in applying for the Aid and Attendance benefit may be obtained by calling 1-800-827-1000. Applications may be submitted on-line at [www.vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp/main.asp](http://www.vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp/main.asp). Information is also available on the Internet at [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) or from any local veterans service organization.

### **MOVING**

If you have a change in address, phone number or email address, please let the adjutant know so records can be updated

*Happy New Year*