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The Advocacy Bulletin

A publication of the Mountain States Chapter
Paralyzed Veterans of America

Inside this issue:

- Cost-of-living and travel reimbursement rates increased for VA benefits.
- Congress appropriates \$61.3 million for new Denver VAMC in FY08 budget.
- A rural Wyoming town receives grant to improve local medical facility.

JUST ANNOUNCED...



Denver will host the 30th Anniversary

National Veterans Wheelchair Games

July 2010

"Games with a Heart A Mile High"

Hosted by the Mt. States Chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America & the Denver VA Medical Center

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MSCPVA MEMBERSHIP

In FY'07, the Denver National Service office filed claims on behalf of 1,256 veterans resulting in \$6,050,679 grant benefits. Of that amount, \$4,406,820 was granted to MSCPVA members.

To begin 2008, MSCPVA has a total of 627 members residing in the four state region.

- **Colorado** has 498 members that reside in the Denver metro area in addition to over 41 members in 16 different towns on the Western Slope.
- **Montana** has 26 members that reside primarily in the Helena area.
- **Utah** has 38 members located in the Salt Lake Basin area.
- **Wyoming** has 24 members that reside in or near Cheyenne.

NEW DENVER VA MEDICAL CENTER UPDATE

The second user group meeting on the Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) unit at Fitzsimons was held in December 2007. Additional sketches and elements of design for that portion of the facility are being reviewed and revised. Frank Menendez with PVA architecture continues to give input on the SCI center accessibility and layout.

Land purchase, design, and planning for the new facility can continue now that President Bush has signed into law the FY 2008 budget for the Department of Veterans' Affairs. The amount of \$61.3 million was appropriated for this major construction project. **MSCPVA commends the CO congressional delegation for working diligently to secure those funds.**

NATIONAL UPDATE

Disabled Veterans Receive Cost-Of-Living & Travel Reimbursement Rate Increase for VA Benefits

President Bush recently signed a law that provides a 2.3% increase in disability compensation and survivors' benefits. Increases began in January 2008 for eligible veterans and family members. Programs included in the cost-of-living increase are veterans' disability compensation, survivors of veterans who died in service or service-connected disability, pension disability benefits, and survivors of wartime veterans who receive death pension.

Furthermore, \$125 million was allocated to the Disabled Veterans Travel Reimbursement program, which allows for the rate to increase from 11 cents per mile to 28.5 cents, effective 02/01/2008. However, deductible amounts also increased to \$7.77 for a one-way trip, \$15.54 for a round trip, with a maximum of \$46.62 per calendar month.

VA Changes Rules Resulting in New Grants for Seriously Injured Veterans

The Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) previously changed a law to expand the amount of grants awarded to seriously injured veterans for constructing or modifying their homes. Before, special adaptive VA housing grants of \$10,000 or \$50,000 were awarded only once. The change allows for eligible veterans to use the benefit up to three times, however, not to exceed the specified limits. Those with specific service-connected disabilities are eligible for the VA compensation. Over the last year, 4,600 veterans submitted applications and nearly 3,900 of those veterans are now deemed to be eligible under the new law.

CONGRESSIONAL ACTION NEEDED

With the 2nd session of the 110th Congress underway, MSCPVA urges both the House and Senate to pass the following pieces of legislation in order to better serve paralyzed veterans:

- H.R. 3985, Over-the-Road Bus Transportation Accessibility Act of 2007 (*House passed; needs Senate action*)
- H.R. 4202, Inclusive Home Design Act (IHDA)
- H.R. 4255, United States Olympic Committee (USOC) Paralympic Program Act of 2007
- H.R. 4884, Veteran Home Loan Guaranty Improvement Act of 2008

REGIONAL UPDATE

Improving Rural Health Care in Wyoming

Midwest, WY was awarded a \$42,200 grant from USDA Rural Development to improve the town's health clinic with state-of-the-art medical supplies and equipment. Residents of Midwest and Edgerton will no longer have to travel to Casper to receive care from a fully equipped medical facility.

Colorado Legislature - 2008 Session Convened on January 9

The Colorado House immediately began work on legislation that provides support to military service members, veterans, and people with disabilities. First, the House passed H.B. 1035, which reauthorizes the Military Family Relief Fund that would have expired this year. The funds can be used by all branches of military, active, reserve and Guard whose families face financial hardship due to deployment. Last year, the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs received \$231,000 from tax check-off donations and provided 24 family grants totaling \$124,000. MSCPVA urges you to continue to support our troops and their families by contributing to this fund and mark the "check-off" box donation when filing your 2007 income taxes.

Second, the House voted to extend the Prescription Drug Information and Technical Assistance program, which will help to make prescription drug use safer by increasing the ability of pharmacists to consult with patients and doctors. The program initially only covered Medicaid recipients, but now covers anyone receiving drug benefits from the Department of Health Care Policy and Financing (HCPF). Key components of the legislation include: reducing medical non-compliance by patients, lessening the chance of serious adverse side effects, and is expected to save Colorado \$1.3 million dollars annually. The bill will now move to the Colorado Senate for further debate.

Additional pieces of legislation that have been introduced for the 2008 session that pertain to veterans & people with disabilities include:

- HB 1068, Tuition Waiver of Purple Heart Recipients
- HB 1072, Medicaid Buy-in Program for People with Disabilities
- HB 1078, Repay Colorado State Veterans Trust Fund

***MSCPVA will work to ensure successful passage of these bills before the legislature adjourns in May.**

Utah Legislature—2008 Session Convened on January 21

The following pieces of legislation have been introduced for the 2008 session and are supported by MSCPVA:

- HB 45, Supported Employment Services to a Person with a Disability
- HB 118, Veterans High School Diplomas
- HB 129, Appropriation for Construction of a Veterans' Nursing Home in Ogden
- HB 217, Utah Purple Heart Recipients Tuition Act Amendments
- HB 279, Tax Incentives for Military Members
- SB 128, Amendments to the Veteran's Property Tax Exemption
- HJR 4, Joint Resolution Urging School Closings to Recognize Veterans Day

Relocation of VA Outpatient Clinic in Aurora, CO

On January 29th, the new Aurora Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) opened its doors to veterans. This clinic, formally located on the Fitzsimons campus, is now located at 13701 E. Mississippi Avenue, Aurora, CO 80012. Veterans in need of medical services at this facility can call (303)398-6340.

If you would like further information on issues presented in this Bulletin, please contact me at lholman@mscpva.org.

This bulletin is also available on the Local Legislative News page of our website at www.mscpva.org.

**Disclaimer: All information contained in this bulletin is taken from publicly available media and information sources.*

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