



## DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS

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# LEGISLATIVE BULLETIN

**December 2010**

### **Continuing Resolution for Department of Veterans Affairs Budget**

On December 9, 2010, the House of Representatives voted to pass a full-year continuing resolution (CR) for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) budget for fiscal year (FY) 2011. Reports indicate the numbers in the CR for VA are equal to the Administration's FY 2011 budget request. The Senate is working on an omnibus bill it hopes to substitute for the House-passed CR. Their rationale is that it is far preferable to fund all federal programs for changed needs and provide detailed directives to agencies, rather than let the government run on "autopilot" under a CR at last year's funding levels. Passage of a detailed CR, however, could somewhat ameliorate those concerns if the Senate or House is unable to garner enough support for the omnibus measure. Another possibility, desired by many members of Congress, is a short-term CR that would continue all federal spending at FY 2010 rates through February 2011.

The House CR includes \$51.5 billion for VA Medical Care budget authority. This appropriation would authorize an estimated \$3.4 billion in medical care collections. The General Operating Expense level is \$2.5 billion. The amount for Departmental Administration and Miscellaneous Programs (including Information Technology, National Cemetery Administration and Office of Inspector General) is \$3.5 billion. It also includes \$1.7 billion for Construction programs. The measure also would provide \$50.6 billion in advance appropriations for FY 2012 for VA medical programs to reflect expected demand at that time. Please keep in mind that these numbers are estimates based on information the DAV has received as of December 15, 2010, and are still subject to change.

### **VA Launching New Personalized Veterans Health Benefits Handbook**

The VA is piloting new, personalized Veterans Health Benefits Handbooks. The handbooks are tailored to provide enrolled veterans with the most relevant health benefits information based on their own specific eligibility. In essence, each handbook will be written for the individual veteran.

"These handbooks will give veterans everything they need to know and leave out everything that doesn't apply to them," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "Our veterans will now have a comprehensive, easy to understand roadmap to the medical benefits they earned with their service."

In addition to highlighting each veteran's specific health benefits, the handbook also provides contact information for the veteran's preferred local facility, ways to schedule personal

appointments, guidelines for communicating treatment needs and an explanation of the veteran's responsibilities, such as copayments when applicable.

“Enhancing access isn't just about expanding the kinds of services VA provides. It also includes making sure we do everything we can to ensure veterans have a clear understanding of the benefits available to them so they can make full use of the services they have earned,” Shinseki said.

The new handbooks will initially be available only to certain veterans in the Cleveland and Washington, D.C., areas. Following the pilot phase, full implementation is scheduled to begin in the fall of 2011 for across the county.

For additional information, go to [www.va.gov/healtheligibility](http://www.va.gov/healtheligibility) or call VA's toll-free number at 1-877-222-VETS (8387).

### **S. 3985, the Senior Citizens Relief Act, Failed in Senate**

On Wednesday, December 8, the Senate voted on S. 3985, the Senior Citizens Relief Act, which would have provided a \$250 emergency payment to seniors and disabled veterans in 2011.

As you know, Social Security recipients have not received a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for two years. This also adversely affects veterans, who rely on the Social Security Administration's COLA to receive a COLA for their disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

This vital legislation would have corrected this inequity with a one-time check of \$250 in 2011. The DAV supported this legislation and urged members to contact their elected officials to support passage of this critical legislation.

A vote of 60 Senators was needed to pass this measure. The vote was 53 to 45; thus, the bill was not passed. We have posted this vote on our website and here is a direct link to the roll call vote: <http://capwiz.com/dav/issues/votes/?votenum=267&chamber=S&congress=1112>.

### **S. 3447, the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Improvements Act, Passed**

S. 3447, the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Improvements Act of 2010, passed the House and was sent to the President on December 16, 2010. We have been working with both chambers of Congress to improve the Post 9/11 GI Bill, particularly in making a housing stipend available to Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) participants. It is largely due to your efforts that this bill was passed during this Congress.

This bill will expand and improve upon the Post 9/11 GI Bill that went into effect last year and it will simplify and improve benefits in a fiscally responsible way. Specifically, the Act will enable veterans to now use their benefit for vocational and on-the-job training, expand eligibility for the benefit to National Guardsmen who are activated for domestic assistance, provide Active Duty troops with additional assistance to purchase books, and provide severely injured veterans and their caregivers with additional time to use their benefits. Section 205 of S. 3447 would

allow veterans with service-connected disabilities that participate in a program of vocational rehabilitation under chapter 31 of title 38, United States Code, who are also entitled to Post-9/11 GI Bill education benefits, to choose whether to receive the monthly housing stipend payable under the Post-9/11 GI Bill or a monthly subsistence allowance. This bill is in accordance with DAV Resolution No. 099, passed at our most recent National Convention.

### **Correction of Mistake in October Legislative Bulletin**

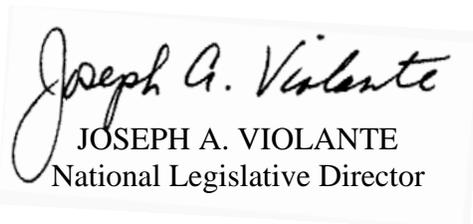
In the October 2010 Legislative Bulletin, we published the following information regarding H.R. 3219, the Veterans Benefits Act of 2010: “Veterans Mortgage Life Insurance (VMLI) for disabled veterans has been increased from \$90,000.00 to \$150,000.00 *effective immediately*...This is an error. The benefit will actually be *effective October 1, 2011*. I apologize for any confusion or inconvenience this may have caused.

### **House Veterans’ Affairs Committee Changes**

During the 111th Congress, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee consisted of 29 members. Of these, only 12 were reelected during the mid-term election. As a result, we have many new members to educate about our issues. The national Legislative staff will be meeting with these members to discuss DAV’s legislative priorities and to educate them about our organizational mission, programs and services. We will also be asking our state departments to do the same at the start of the 112th Congress. We will let you know when we have more information about Committee assignments.

### **Conclusion**

To ensure the successful enactment of veterans’ legislation, our DAV and Auxiliary members must be active members of DAV’s grassroots – DAV Commander’s Action Network (CAN) — and we all must do our part to let our elected officials know about our support for legislation that helps to build better lives for our nation’s service-disabled veterans, their families, and survivors. We hope that you all have a safe and happy Holiday season. Thank you for your continued support.



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