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**DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS**

DEPARTMENT OF NEW YORK, INC.  
200 Atlantic Avenue, Lynbrook, New York 11563



**JANUARY 2009 NEWSLETTER**

## **COMMANDER'S COLUMN**

*By Robert J. Finnerty, Department Commander*

I hope you all had a great holiday season. I especially thank everyone who supported our Department, voting for the purchase of a new Headquarters building. The building is just what the Department needs to keep moving forward in the coming years.

It's time to get back to work at our Chapters and hospitals. Making sure our veterans receive the care and benefits that they have earned. In February, we will be traveling to Washington, D.C. for our Mid-Winter Conference. Our Department has the responsibility of organizing the breakfast for the northeastern states. Congressmen and Senators from this northeastern region will be invited. Come and join the hundreds of comrades from throughout the country. It will be a valuable opportunity that you should not miss, especially since you will have little or no indication on how the new VA Secretary will handle the VA Regional Office scandals, or what new ideas about changing the VA will be presented.

**VA Travel Reimbursement** – The VA as of 2009 will reimburse travel at a rate of 41.5 cents a mile. This is an allowance for veterans with over a 30% service-connected disability rating. A veteran traveling for treatment of a service-connected condition; traveling for scheduled compensation or pension examinations is eligible for reimbursement. Mileage deductibles will decrease to \$3.00 for a one-way trip; \$6.00 for a round trip, with a maximum of \$18.00 per calendar month. However, these deductibles can be waived if they cause a financial hardship to a veteran.

On April 1, 2009, the start of the New York State fiscal budget will begin. New York will increase the number of staff personnel for the Division of Veterans Affairs. Under the new budget, the Division of Veterans Affairs has lost 3.0 million dollars from last year. That is a lot less than other State Departments. However, this State needs greater monetary help for its one million plus veterans and their families.

In closing, have a happy and healthy new year. I am looking forward to seeing you at the February Mid-Winter Conference in Washington, D. C. and also at the March State Executive Meeting at Hudson Valley.

## **SEW WATT'S NU?**

*By Sidney Siller, Sr., PDC, Department Adjutant*

Some philosopher or a would be "crystal-baller" once said, "there is nothing new in the world, except for perhaps a new twist on an old idea." The Department of New York likes new twists even if the basic idea is not new.



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This year we have instituted a new twist on an existing program for DAV-NY, which is the Department Service Officer (DSO) Program. This program is a program that our National Department encourages, and a number of other Departments have utilized effectively. The Director of DAV-NY's DSO Program is Bob Dolan, a man who is probably as well known as John Hancock, for have written over his career hundreds of thousands of letters from the Department of Veteran's Affairs Rating Boards in the New York regional area. Bob Dolan is a fine gentleman with a helluva "curriculum vitae."

The program will be maintained by the Department of New York and trained by NSO Supervisor for our New York Department Jeff Hall; and his staff. Basically speaking, the training that the DSO's of New York are to receive far exceeds the training that Chapter Service Officers receive at Department of New York Conventions.

We expect to have candidates from every area of New York State so that every part of New York receives the outreach from our DSO's. In one instance, prior to the institution and commencement of development of this program Frank Kiss, out at Northport interceded in 1,800 claims over the recent last six (6) months. What costs and expenses that we will incur will be borne by the Department of New York.

Director of DAV-NY's DSOs Bob Dolan with our help and support will be a valuable arrow in the quiver of our effort to support the work of our NSOs in the State of New York, and further our DAV mission.

Not new, but still in the vein of a new program is our 2<sup>nd</sup> Northeastern Congressional Legislative Breakfast which is scheduled to be held on February 24, 2009 in the Capitol at 9:00 am. The cost of this event is \$50.00.

The importance of this event is that we invite all of the Representatives and Senators from the 12 participating states to attend our breakfast the same morning that National Commander Ray Dempsey makes his important DAV Statement to the Joint House and Senate Veteran's Committee that afternoon. This idea is too young to be a tradition, but keep on supporting it and it will be.

Many came to our Hospitality Room in Las Vegas, Nevada last August and supported the continuation of this event. The Breakfast is not cheap, but it is a necessary part of doing business on a high level.

On November 6, 2008, the Department Commander Bob Finnerty and I attended a meeting in the State Capital. As Department Adjutant, I requested three things from the State of New York. I asked for a contribution of \$2.00 for every veteran in New York State to be donated to the Disabled for Life Memorial we are building in Washington, DC; a full tax exemption on real estate for every 100% disabled veteran in the New York



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State; and I requested the legislature to vacate their defense of their lawsuit which opposes returning to the 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment Armory on Park Avenue and East 67<sup>th</sup> Street in New York City, which the Department of New York is a Plaintiff.

Last and certainly not least the Department of New York is working on the possibility of obtaining it's own Headquarters that will add much to our prestige if the possibility is achieved. More on this as events transpire.

So what's new, I ask you. Although we are about to enter our 88<sup>th</sup> year as America's premier service organization, brand new concepts can be achieved. Nothing is ever new or perfect. But, the most I can say about that is this old sword. "Perfection is the enemy of Achievement." So, Bring on the New Year.

### **VA URGES VETS TO SIGN-UP FOR DIRECT DEPOSITS**

*VA Press Release*

WASHINGTON (December 15, 2008) -- Every month, 730,000 veterans or survivors look for their compensation, pension checks or educational assistance payments in their mailboxes. Nearly all receive them, but theft and mail delays cause problems for some veterans, which can be prevented by direct deposits.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is urging those veterans and family members now receiving paper checks to join nearly 3.1 million others whose VA payments are safely deposited electronically.

"VA is teaming up with the Treasury Department in a new campaign to protect government beneficiaries against the theft of funds and of their identities," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. "Veterans earned -- and rely on -- the financial support we send them every month. I urge them to help VA ensure they get those funds reliably and safely by signing up for direct deposit."

Peake cited several easy ways to sign up for direct deposit – calling VA toll-free at (800) 333-1795 or enrolling online at [www.GoDirect.org](http://www.GoDirect.org). Veterans, and family members who receive VA payments, also can sign up by contacting a VA regional benefits office or their financial institution. Information about direct deposits will be included in VA's monthly compensation and pension envelopes throughout 2009.

The VA Secretary urged veterans to remember that direct deposits relieve worry about mail delivery being delayed by severe weather or natural disasters. The deposits also eliminate trips to banks or credit unions to deposit checks, while providing immediate access to money at the same time each month.



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## **AGGRESSIVE, TRANSPARENT LEADERSHIP NEEDED TO SOLVE VA'S PROBLEMS**

*DAV Press Release*

WASHINGTON—The Disabled American Veterans offers its congratulations to Eric Shinseki, President-elect Obama's nominee to head the Department of Veterans Affairs, and looks forward to working with him to help fulfill our nation's obligation to veterans.

"If confirmed by the Senate, it is vital that Shinseki waste no time in establishing himself as a strong veterans' advocate at this crucial point in the agency's history," said DAV National Commander Raymond E. Dempsey. "With a growing number of wounded and disabled veterans from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan putting even greater strain on the VA, already struggling to meet the needs of millions of other veterans from previous wars and eras, the VA needs a strong leader who can immediately take charge of the department."

Dempsey noted that the VA must have strong, aggressive leadership to solve long-standing problems within the department. These include a massive backlog of claims for disability compensation and other benefits, worsened by recent revelations about mishandling of claims-related documents. "That coupled with the challenges of a strained health care system, makes it imperative that the VA have a leader who is committed to doing what is right for our veterans. The VA needs a Secretary who is committed to serving veterans effectively and compassionately, now and in the future."

As Army Chief of Staff, Shinseki demonstrated a willingness to address issues openly and honestly, even though his views were not in line with those of the administration or his superiors at the Pentagon. "That's the kind of integrity and leadership the VA needs in order to fulfill our nation's sacred obligation to veterans," Dempsey said.

### **OUR NEW YEARS THANKS GO TO –**

Ralph Mottola; Harold Radish; Sal Grasso, and all of our Ex-POW buddies for their \$1,000.00 contribution to the Department of New York Building Fund.

Frank Appice and the wonderful patriots from Rolling Thunder Chapter #2 for their contribution tot the Department of New York Assisted Living Fund.

And finally the giver of all givers, Sam Jaffe, who donated two (2) vans for the DAV Transportation Program, in the sum of \$26,000.00.



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These men represent the best in all of us for their charitable contributions to the benefit of all of us.

God bless all of our troops, past and present.

## **VA TO PROVIDE PAYMENTS TO ELIGIBLE SURVIVING SPOUSES**

*VA Press Release*

WASHINGTON (Dec. 18, 2008) - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced immediate actions to quickly identify and pay surviving spouses who are eligible to receive a one-time compensation or pension payment for the month of the veteran's death.

"This benefit payment is long overdue to many of our beneficiaries," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. "In these difficult economic times, it is imperative that we take aggressive action to fix this situation for the families of our veterans."

Problems in VA's implementation of a change in law that was effective in 1997 resulted in some surviving spouses not receiving the veteran's compensation or pension payment for the month of death. This problem was recently brought to VA's attention by Sen. Daniel K. Akaka, chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Peake immediately directed the formation of a special task force to identify and pay the beneficiaries who never received the benefit or were inadvertently required to repay the money issued for the month of a veteran's death.

Surviving spouses most likely to be affected by this processing problem are those who never applied to VA for survivors' benefits following the death of a veteran.

The task force is in the process of reviewing VA's payment records for veterans who died after December 31, 1996, and who are survived by a spouse. The review will identify those to whom VA owes retroactive benefits for the month of the veteran's death. Current address information is being obtained for as many of these beneficiaries as possible.

VA will begin issuing retroactive payments to eligible surviving spouses at the end of this month. Payments will continue to be issued as additional unpaid beneficiaries are identified and VA is able to obtain current address information.

Because there are deceased veterans for whom VA does not have marital status information, a special Survivors' Call Center has been established for spouses who believe they may be entitled to this retroactive month-of-death benefit.



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Surviving spouses are encouraged to contact the Survivors' Call Center at the toll-free telephone number, 1-800-749-8387. Call center agents will assist surviving spouses in providing VA with the information needed to determine their eligibility.

The Call Center is open Monday through Friday from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm central standard time. Inquiries may also be submitted through the Internet at <http://www.vba.va.gov/survivorsbenefit.htm>.

VA is aggressively changing its processing procedures to ensure this benefit is correctly paid to all surviving spouses in the future. VA's disability payment system will also be enhanced to automate the month-of-death payment for all eligible surviving spouses.

## **VA ASSISTING VETERANS WITH HEALTH CARE COSTS**

*VA Press Release*

WASHINGTON (Jan. 6, 2009) -- For veterans struggling financially due to a job loss or decreased income, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers an assortment of programs that can relieve the costs of health care or provide care at no cost.

"With the downturn in the economy, VA recognizes that many veterans will feel the effects," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. "Therefore, it is important that eligible veterans learn of the many ways VA has to help them afford the health care they have earned."

Veterans whose previous income was ruled too high for VA health care may be able to enter the VA system based upon a hardship if their current year's income is projected to fall below federal income thresholds due to a job loss, separation from service or some other financial setback. Veterans determined eligible due to hardship can avoid copays applied to higher-income veterans. Qualifying veterans may be eligible for enrollment and receive health care at no cost.

Also eligible for no-cost VA care are most veterans who recently returned from a combat zone. They are entitled to five years of free VA care. The five-year "clock" begins with their discharge from the military, not their departure from the combat zone.

Each VA medical center across the country has an enrollment coordinator available to provide veterans information about these programs. Veterans may also contact VA's Health Benefits Service Center at 1-877-222 VETS (8387) or visit the VA health eligibility website at [www.va.gov/healtheligibility](http://www.va.gov/healtheligibility).



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## **110TH CONGRESS STATISTICS**

*Source: EANGUS Minuteman Update 18 Dec 08*

The 110th Congress spanned two years (as every Congress does) from JAN 07 until DEC 08. Some statistics compiled by GalleryWatch about its performance as it closes out its business and America prepares for the 111th Congress are:

- House bills introduced: 7,303
- Senate bills introduced: 3,717
- Number of bills that became public law: 453 (4.1%)
- Number of public laws that named post offices: 108
- House days in session: 280
- Senate days in session: 363
- Member who introduced the most bills, House or Senate: Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-NY)-88
- Member with most speaking appearances on House floor: Rep. Ted Poe (R-TX)-215
- Member with most speaking appearances on Senate floor: Sen. Harry Reid (D-NV)-299
- House hours of debate: 1,449
- Senate hours of debate: 1,713
- House hours voting: 241 (average 12:58 minutes per vote)
- Senate hours voting: 152 (average 20:32 minutes per vote)
- House Armed Services Committee: Bills referred to committee: 536; Number of hearings held: 62; Bills passed out of committee: 6 (1.1%).
- House Veterans Affairs Committee: Bills referred to committee: 344; Number of hearings held: 29; Bills passed out of committee: 38 (11%).
- Senate Armed Services Committee: Bills referred to committee: 162; Number of hearings held: 60; Bills passed out of committee: 3 (1.9%).
- Senate Veterans Affairs Committee: Bills referred to committee: 186; Number of hearings held: 51; Bills passed out of committee: 12 (6.5%).

All bills introduced in the 110th Congress that were not passed into law in 2008 are now void. They can be reintroduced into the 111th Congress if their sponsors decide to do so as new bills with new bill numbers. Congress will convene the 111th Congress on January 6, 2009.

## **NATIONAL DAV LAUNCHES NEW WEBSITE**

After more than a year of work, the DAV is proud to present its new and improved website. The new design features improved navigability, interactive magazines, and new resources for veterans to find the assistance they need. We have also added new content highlighting key information and events from across the organization. Here are just a few



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of the new features:

**Intelligent Navigation.** We have a more consistent, easy-to-use menu system. Major sections can be accessed using the menu items across the top; and within each section, information can be accessed using menus on the left-hand side of the screen.

**Interactive Magazine.** The [DAV Magazine](#) can now be viewed online, just as you would read a printed magazine. Key features include a page index, slide show functionality, zoom capability...all complete with a page turning effect!

**National Service Office Locator.** We have made it easier for veterans to find the assistance they need through our new ["NSO Locator"](#). This interactive map assists you in finding the National Service Office closest to you.

**User Friendly Appearance.** The new DAV website features several enhancements to the overall appearance. We've focused on making the site attractive, readable, and accessible to all of our visitors.

Our website visitors have been vocal in their applause for our existing site and in their suggestions to see us improve the site. The web development team has been listening, and we have been working on even better solutions. We're excited about what the new website offers our visitors and we hope you are too! If you have questions or comments about the new site, please email us at: [webmaster@davmail.org](mailto:webmaster@davmail.org).

### **TAPS**

Department has been notified that the following comrades have been called into final formation above:

**William A. Caughey**, Chapter #153, 12/17/08

**Thomas A. Clark**, Chapter #153, 12/19/08

Department and the membership extend deepest sympathies to the family members, friends and comrades of these fallen heroes. May each one rest in honor.

Please feel free to call, write or e-mail [davny@optonline.net](mailto:davny@optonline.net) Headquarters if you have a loss in your Chapter that you would like to include in this column.

### **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**



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**2009 Mid-Winter Conference**

February 22, 2009 to February 25, 2009  
Crystal Gateway Marriott  
Arlington, VA 22202

**State Executive Committee Meeting**

March 13, 2009 to March 15, 2009  
Hudson Valley Resort  
Kerhonkson, NY

**DAV National Commander Testimonial Dinner**

Saturday March 21, 2009  
Fountain Blue Banquet and Conference Center  
Des Plaines, IL

**Department of New York's 88th Anniversary Celebration**

Sunday May 17, 2009  
El Caribe Country Club  
Brooklyn, New York

**Department of New York Convention**

June 28, 2009 to July 1, 2009  
Hudson Valley Resort  
Kerhonkson, New York

**Rehab Cruise XVII**

July 14, 2009  
Nautical Empress  
Freeport, NY

**2009 National DAV Convention**

August 22, 2009 to August 25, 2009  
Sheraton Hotel Denver  
Denver, CO 80202