



# OPERATIONS IRAQI FREEDOM/ ENDURING FREEDOM REVIEW

GLOBAL  
WAR  
ON  
TERROR

## Information for Veterans Who Served in Iraq and Afghanistan and Their Families

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### PRESIDENTIAL TASK FORCE PROPOSES IMPROVED SERVICES FOR GWOT VETERANS

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson recently served as chair of the Presidential Task Force on Returning Global War on Terror Heroes and submitted the group’s report to the White House on April 19, 2007. The recommendations outlined in the report focus on the needs of service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan and have been accepted by the President as submitted by the Secretary on April 23, 2007. “The Federal government must be responsive and efficient in delivering our benefits and services to these heroes,” Nicholson said during a speech to the National Press Club. “They should not have to fight bureaucratic red tape for benefits earned by their courageous service.”

Secretary Nicholson’s Task Force Report identifies many needs voiced by recently returning veterans, ranging from more timely receipt of benefits and better information to more streamlined processes. The Task Force Report announces steps to improve veterans’ access to services and programs, bringing together top officials from the Departments and Agencies that each have a role in delivering services to U.S. veterans: Defense, Veterans Affairs, Labor, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and Education, as well as the Office of Management and Budget, the Small Business Administration and Office of Personnel Management.

The Task Force report, outlining recommendations to improve delivery of Federal services to returning military men and women, is available on VA’s web site at [www.va.gov/taskforce/](http://www.va.gov/taskforce/).

### VA VET CENTERS COMING TO 23 MORE COMMUNITIES

The Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) Vet Center program, which provides a wide range of readjustment counseling and outreach services to combat veterans, is expanding into 23 new communities across the nation in the next two years. These facilities are an important resource for veterans returning from the Global War on Terror and their families.

“Our Vet Centers lead the world in helping combat veterans successfully readjust to life at home,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson. “It’s an important service which combat veterans have earned. VA continues to expand into more communities with our Vet Centers to

bring our services closer to the veterans who need them.” New Vet Centers will be located in Montgomery, Ala.; Fayetteville, Ark.; Modesto, Calif.; Grand Junction, Colo.; Orlando, Fort Myers, and Gainesville, Fla.; Macon, Ga.; Manhattan, Kan.; Baton Rouge, La.; Cape Cod, Mass.; Saginaw and Iron Mountain, Mich.; Berlin, N.H.; Las Cruces, N.M.; Binghamton, Middletown, Nassau County and Watertown, N.Y.; Toledo, Ohio; Du Bois, Penn.; Killeen, Texas; and Everett, Wash.

All Vet Centers are community-based. They provide counseling on mental health and employment, plus services on family issues, education, bereavement and outreach, to combat veterans and their families. They are staffed by small teams of counselors, outreach specialists and other specialists, many of whom are combat veterans themselves.

The Vet Center program was established by Congress in 1979 in recognition that a significant number of Vietnam veterans were still experiencing readjustment problems. Today, all veterans who served in combat are eligible for care at a VA Vet Center at no cost, as are their families for

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military-related issues. Also eligible are veterans who were sexually assaulted or harassed while on active duty and the families of service members who die on active duty.

VA maintains Vet Centers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

### **VA'S KUSSMAN SWORN IN AS UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH, HARVEY CONFIRMED BY SENATE**

The U.S. Senate confirmed appointments on May 25, 2007, of two experienced veterans' advocates to top jobs at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) where they will serve as VA's senior physician and chief of congressional affairs.

Dr. Michael J. Kussman was sworn in July 9, 2007 as Under Secretary for Health, and Thomas E. Harvey was confirmed as Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs. "The continued service of these two dedicated public servants will significantly advance the interests of America's veterans," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson. "Their confirmations are good news for veterans and their families."

Dr. Kussman, a native of Troy, N.Y., joined VA in 2000. Among his VA positions, he has served as Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health and since August 2006 as Acting Under Secretary for Health.

A graduate of Boston University Medical School, he is a retired Army brigadier general who spent more than 25 years on active duty. He commanded the Walter Reed Health Care System and the European Regional Medical Command.

Mr. Harvey, who holds a law degree from the University of Notre Dame, commanded an airborne infantry company during the Vietnam War. He holds the Silver Star and the Purple Heart.

He was Deputy Administrator of VA's predecessor organization, the Veterans Administration, from 1986 to 1989. A former chief counsel and staff director for the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, he has also been General Counsel for the U.S. Information Agency, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisitions and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Logistics.

### **NEW VA ADVISORY PANEL TO IMPROVE SERVICES FOR RETURNING COMBAT VETERANS**

The Department of Veterans Affairs has announced the formation of a formal, 17-person committee that will advise the Secretary regarding ways to improve VA programs serving veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), and their families. The Secretary's announcement about the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) panel, called the Advisory Committee on OIF/OEF

Veterans and Families, comes on the heels of his presentation of recommendations from a presidential task force to improve services to the nation's newest generation of combat veterans.

"This panel will report directly to me," Nicholson said. "I am asking for their ideas and input on how VA can consistently ensure world-class service to America's newest generation of heroes, particularly severely disabled veterans and their families."

"A number of panels already have been asking tough questions about our programs for veterans transitioning to civilian life," Nicholson added. "This committee, to be chaired by retired Lt. Gen. David Barno, consists of OIF and OEF wounded veterans, family members, survivors, leaders of the major veterans organizations and long-time veterans advocates."

"This group of people have experienced war and our system of care and can advise me from first-hand experience on how we are doing and what we need to do better," Nicholson added.

The new OIF/OEF advisory committee will discuss its general work program, future meeting dates, and plans for site visits to VA facilities around the country. The schedule includes briefings by senior officials of VA's key programs, comments by members of the public who register in advance with the committee, discussions about "seamless transition" goals and procedures affecting combat veterans moving from the military to civilian life.

Members of the VA Advisory Committee on OIF/OEF Veterans and Families are: Lt. Gen. Barno of Washington, D.C.; Dawn Halfaker of Washington, D.C.; Lonnie Moore of San Diego; Jack L. Tilley of Riverview, Fla.; Gary Wilson of Carlsbad, Calif.; Liza Biggers of New York City; Pam Estes of Dayton, Md.; Caroline Maney of Shalimar, Fla.; Kimberly Hazelgrove of Lorton, Va.; Michael Ayoub of Ashburn, Va.; Rocky McPherson of Tallahassee, Fla.; John Sommer of Annandale, Va.; Dennis Donovan of Atlanta; Frances Hackett of South Plainfield, N.J.; Paul F. Livengood of Manassas, Va.; Tim McClain of Alexandria, Va.; and Chris Yoder of Baltimore, MD.

People seeking more information or who wish to address the Committee may do so via email to [OIFOEF@va.gov](mailto:OIFOEF@va.gov) or in writing to: Department of Veterans Affairs, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420, Attn: Advisory Committee on OIF OEF Veterans and Families (008A).

### **NICHOLSON ANNOUNCES 100 NEW PATIENT ADVOCATES FOR WOUNDED VETERANS AND 100 NEW OUTREACH WORKERS FOR LATEST COMBAT VETS**

Continuing the strong support of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in meeting the needs of returning combat veterans, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson announced the Department is immediately hiring 100 new patient advocates

to help severely injured veterans and their families navigate VA's systems for health care and financial benefits.

“Even in a system like VA's, that now has over one million patient visits a week and is rated by many as ‘the best health care system in the country,’ even one veteran not receiving world-class care is unacceptable,” Nicholson told a meeting of senior leaders of the American Legion.

The VA Secretary said the 100 new patient advocates will be veterans of the combat theaters in Iraq or Afghanistan. Their job will be to ensure a smooth transition for wounded service members to VA health care facilities throughout the nation, while also cutting through red tape for other benefits. In addition, Nicholson also announced that VA will hire 100 new employees to provide readjustment counseling at the Department's community-based Vet Centers. VA also recently hired 100 new Vet Center employees, who are combat veterans, to conduct outreach to veterans of the Global War on Terror.

### **DOD MENTAL HEALTH SELF-ASSESSMENT PROGRAM AVAILABLE FOR SERVICE MEMBERS AND FAMILIES: NEW ENHANCEMENTS LAUNCH IN 2007**

#### **Available for Service Members and Families: New Enhancements Launch in 2007**

The Mental Health Self-Assessment Program (MHSAP) offers service personnel and their family members the opportunity to take anonymous, mental health and alcohol screenings both online and through special events held at installations. The online program is available 24/7 at [www.MilitaryMentalHealth.org](http://www.MilitaryMentalHealth.org) and installations interested in conducting mental health and alcohol education events can register for materials free of charge.

MHSAP is offered to more than 1.5 million military families affected by deployment in all branches, including the National Guard and Reserve. It is designed to help families and service personnel identify their own symptoms and to think about seeking assistance before a problem becomes serious. The tests available address depression, bipolar disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder and alcohol use. After an individual completes a self-assessment, he or she is given referral information including services provided through the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs.

The Mental Health Self-Assessment Program is an extension of the DoD's ongoing efforts to reach service members and their families and provide them with the information they need about the resources available to them. Unlike the mandatory post-deployment health surveys, this program is voluntary, anonymous and is accessible any time. It will serve troops that develop symptoms later, or who want to test themselves anonymously before seeking help. It is also for family members, who otherwise do not have a self-assessment mechanism.

Launched in 2006, the program is being expanded in 2007 to provide more services for families concerned about themselves or their children.

The enhancements include:

#### **Customizable Referrals**

Individual military bases and National Guard units will be able to add customized referrals to the online screening, linking individuals with local services in addition to DoD and VA mental health services.

#### **Telephone Self-Assessment**

There will be a new interactive telephone self-assessment program that addresses depression and alcohol problems for those military families and service members who do not have easy access to the Internet. A toll-free number, **1-877-877-3647** will connect callers to the anonymous self-assessment. Callers will receive immediate results and phone numbers where they can call for treatment or educational resources.

#### **A Pilot Spanish Language Version of the Program**

Spanish language materials will be available for in-person self-assessment, online screening and the new telephone component.

The Mental Health Self-Assessment Program™ is offered through the nonprofit Screening for Mental Health, and is funded by the DoD, Force Health Protection and Readiness, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, Health Affairs.

Information on how to participate in the program is available by calling SMH at **781-239-0071**, emailing [Military@MentalHealthScreening.org](mailto:Military@MentalHealthScreening.org) or going online at [www.MentalHealthScreening.org/Military](http://www.MentalHealthScreening.org/Military).

#### **Key Information**

Online screening: [www.MilitaryMentalHealth.org](http://www.MilitaryMentalHealth.org)

Telephone screening: **1-877-877-3647**

Register for in-person materials for bases/installations or customize an online screening:

[www.MentalHealthScreening.org/Military](http://www.MentalHealthScreening.org/Military)

#### **WHAT'S NEW?**

The Review begins a new feature with this edition, “What's New?” Programs, benefits, and services provided by VA and other Federal agencies will be highlighted. Information in this edition includes:

- **HireVetsFirst: Department of Labor's Transition Program**
- **Small Business Administration's Patriot Express Loans**
- **VA Home Loan Guaranty**



- **Education Benefits for Returning OIF OEF Veterans**
- **Federal Student Aid**

For additional information on other benefits programs, please check online at [www.vba.va.gov/benefit\\_facts/index.htm](http://www.vba.va.gov/benefit_facts/index.htm)

## **HireVetsFirst: Department of Labor’s Transition Program**

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) makes many programs and opportunities available to qualified veterans, reservists, and service members. These include educational opportunities, career counseling and placement assistance, as well as information resources, at DOL, VA, and other locations.

Veterans’ Employment and Training Service (VETS) is the U.S. DOL agency responsible for helping veterans make the transition from the military to good civilian jobs and for protecting their employment rights and benefits.

Opportunities offered by the U.S. DOL, both through VETS and other programs, will be featured in this and upcoming issues of the Review. Facts regarding current programs may be obtained at the U.S. DOL web site at [www.dol.gov/vets/programs/fact/Employment\\_Services\\_fs01.htm](http://www.dol.gov/vets/programs/fact/Employment_Services_fs01.htm). Location specific office information is available on the Internet at [www.dol.gov/dol/location.htm](http://www.dol.gov/dol/location.htm).

For more information about U.S. DOL employment and training programs for veterans, contact the VETS office nearest you, listed in the phone book in the United States Government under the Labor Department or visit: [www.dol.gov/vets/aboutvets/contacts/main.htm](http://www.dol.gov/vets/aboutvets/contacts/main.htm).

The following information is taken from DOL’s current “VETS Fact Sheet 1” at [www.dol.gov/vets/programs/fact/Employment\\_Services\\_fs01.htm](http://www.dol.gov/vets/programs/fact/Employment_Services_fs01.htm). Updates will be posted in future issues:

### **Employment Services for Veterans**

The Department of Labor’s VETS program, through cooperative efforts with, and grants to, each state, offers employment and training services to eligible veterans through two principal programs: Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program (DVOP) Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program (DVOP) and Local Veterans’ Employment Representatives Program. Information is available on the Internet at [www.dol.gov/vets/programs/fact/Employment\\_Services\\_fs01.htm#DVOP#DVOP](http://www.dol.gov/vets/programs/fact/Employment_Services_fs01.htm#DVOP#DVOP).

DVOP specialists develop job and training opportunities for veterans, with special emphasis on veterans with service-connected disabilities in order to make them competitive in

the labor market. DVOP specialists work with employers, veterans’ organizations, the VA and U.S. Department of Defense, and community-based organizations to link veterans with appropriate jobs and training opportunities.

The U.S. DOL provides grant funds to each state’s employment service to maintain DVOP specialist positions in the state. DVOP specialists are employees of the state and are generally located in state employment service offices. About one-quarter are stationed full-or part-time in locations other than employment service offices.

To contact a DVOP specialist, call or visit the nearest State Employment Service (sometimes known as Job Service) agency listed in the State Government section of your phone book.

Local Veterans’ Employment Representatives (LVERs) are state employees located in state employment service local offices to provide assistance to veterans. Assistance includes career counseling, testing, and identifying training and employment opportunities. LVERs also monitor federal department and agency vacancies listed at local state employment service offices.

### **Small Business Administration’s Patriot Express Loans**

With nearly a quarter of newly discharged veterans considering starting their own businesses, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson praised a new Small Business Administration venture to make business ownership easier for all veterans.

The Small Business Administration (SBA) has unveiled a program called “Patriot Express” that offers a wide variety of assistance to veterans interested in setting up or expanding their own small businesses.

“America’s veterans are a great resource for the private sector,” Nicholson said. “I commend Administrator Steve Preston of the Small Business Administration for his initiative in helping veterans transition back into the private sector.”

Assistance under the new SBA program for veterans ranges from help writing a business plan and managing a business, to obtaining financing and learning how to export goods. Participants may also qualify for loans between 2.25 percent and 4.75 percent over the prime interest rate.

Patriot Express is open to veterans, Reservists and National Guard members, current spouses of eligible personnel, the surviving spouses of service members who die on active duty, or spouses of veterans who die from a service-connected disability.

Expanding veterans' eligibility to SBA's Patriot Express program was a key recommendation of a presidential task force on the needs of returning veterans that Nicholson chaired.

More information about the SBA program is available at [www.sba.gov/patriotexpress](http://www.sba.gov/patriotexpress) or contact the SBA Answer Desk **1-800-U-ASK-SBA (1-800-827-5722)**. Email may be sent to: [answerdesk@sba.gov](mailto:answerdesk@sba.gov).

### **VA Home Loan Guaranty**

A VA-guaranteed home loan offers a number of safeguards and advantages. For example, the interest rate is competitive with conventional rates with little or no down payment required. VA-guaranteed loans are made by private lenders, such as banks, savings and loan associations, and mortgage companies, but guaranteed by VA. As with any loan, you must apply directly to the lender. Your real estate broker can assist you in finding a lender.

When the loan is approved, VA will guarantee part of it. The amount of VA's guaranty usually depends on the size of the loan. This guaranty protects the lender against loss up to the amount guaranteed by VA. This gives veterans a big advantage when they apply.

A VA-guaranteed loan can be used to:

- buy a home, a manufactured home, or a condominium
- buy a lot for a manufactured home
- build, repair, or improve a home (including energy efficient improvements)
- refinance an existing loan

Generally, the following persons are eligible:

- veterans who were discharged since 9/16/40, under other than dishonorable conditions
- military personnel on active duty who have served a minimum period
- certain Reservists and National Guard members
- surviving spouses of certain deceased veterans

You can apply by requesting your lender to obtain a certificate for you through VA's secure web site. For more information, go to [www.homeloans.va.gov](http://www.homeloans.va.gov) or toll free at **1-888-244-6711**.

### **Education Benefits for Returning OIF/OEF Veterans**

Requests for education benefits from OIF/OEF veterans are receiving priority review and processing at VA in order to expedite opportunities to this deserving group. VA's Education Service administers education programs that provide benefits to qualified veterans, service members, Reservists and dependents.

Information about educational programs and the applications process is available on the Internet at [www.gibill.va.gov](http://www.gibill.va.gov) or by calling **1-888-GIBILL1**.

This listing will be updated in future issues of the Review.

### **Montgomery GI Bill - Active Duty (MGIB-AD)**

The MGIB program provides up to 36 months of education benefits to qualified veterans. This benefit may be used for degree and certificate programs, flight training, apprenticeship/on-the-job training and correspondence courses. Remedial, deficiency, and refresher courses may be approved under certain circumstances. *Generally, benefits are payable for 10 years following your release from active duty.* This program is also commonly known as "Chapter 30".

Some service members may contribute up to an additional \$600 to the GI Bill to receive increased monthly benefits. For an additional \$600 contribution, you may receive up to \$5400 in additional GI Bill benefits. The increased benefit is only payable after leaving active duty, and the additional contribution must be made while on active duty. For more information contact your personnel or payroll office.

Additional information is available at our web site:

[www.gibill.va.gov](http://www.gibill.va.gov).

### **Montgomery GI Bill - Selected Reserve (MGIB-SR)**

The MGIB-SR program may be available to you if you are a member of the Selected Reserve. The Selected Reserve includes the Army Reserve, Navy Reserve, Air Force Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve and Coast Guard Reserve, and the Army National Guard and the Air National Guard. This benefit may be used for degree and certificate programs, flight training, apprenticeship/on-the-job training and correspondence courses. Remedial, deficiency, and refresher courses may be approved under certain circumstances.

Additional information is available at our web site:

[www.gibill.va.gov](http://www.gibill.va.gov).

### **Reserve Educational Assistance Program (REAP)**

REAP was established as a part of the Ronald W. Reagan National Defense Authorization Act of 2005. It is a U.S. Department of Defense education benefit program designed to provide educational assistance to members of the Reserve components who were called or ordered to active duty in response to a war or national emergency (contingency operation) as declared by the President or Congress. This program makes certain Reservists who were activated for at least 90 days after September 11, 2001, either eligible for education benefits or eligible for increased benefits.

Additional information is available at our web site:

[www.gibill.va.gov](http://www.gibill.va.gov).

## Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program (DEA)

DEA provides education and training opportunities to the eligible dependents (usually children and spouses) of veterans who are permanently and totally disabled due to a service-related condition, or who died while on active duty or as a result of a service-related condition. The program offers up to forty five months of education benefits. These benefits may be used for degree and certificate programs, apprenticeship, and on-the-job training. If you are a spouse, you may take a correspondence course. Remedial, deficiency, and refresher courses may be approved under certain circumstances.

Section 301 of Public Law 109-461 adds a new category to the definition of "eligible person" for DEA benefits. The new category includes the spouse or child of a veteran who fulfills all of the following requirements:

- VA determines has a service-connected permanent and total disability; and
- at the time of VA's determination is a member of the Armed Forces who is hospitalized or receiving outpatient medical care, services, or treatment; and
- is likely to be discharged or released from service for this service-connected disability.

Persons eligible under this new provision may be eligible for DEA benefits effective December 23, 2006, the effective date of the law.

Additional information is available at our web site:  
[www.gibill.va.gov](http://www.gibill.va.gov)

## Veterans Educational Assistance Program (VEAP)

VEAP is available if you first entered active duty between January 1, 1977, and June 30, 1985, and you elected to make contributions from your military pay to participate in this education benefit program. Your contributions are matched on a \$2 for \$1 basis by the Government. This benefit may be used for degree and certificate programs, flight training, apprenticeship/on-the-job training and correspondence courses. Remedial, deficiency, and refresher courses may be approved under certain circumstances.

Additional information is available at our web site:  
[www.gibill.va.gov](http://www.gibill.va.gov)

## Federal Student Aid

Veterans may also be eligible for Federal student Aid programs administered by the U.S. Department of Education. For in-depth information about the Federal student aid programs, please visit the Department of Education's website at [www.FederalStudentAid.ed.gov](http://www.FederalStudentAid.ed.gov).

Some frequently asked questions and answers regarding Federal student aid programs are listed below:

### I am an older student. Am I eligible to receive financial assistance?

Age is not a factor in determining eligibility for the federal student aid programs. Check out federal student aid eligibility criteria at [www.FederalStudentAid.ed.gov](http://www.FederalStudentAid.ed.gov).

### Can I use my Montgomery GI Bill and still get federal student aid at the same time?

Yes. When you complete your *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA), you will be asked what you will be receiving in veterans educational benefits, which the Montgomery GI Bill falls under. Your school will take into consideration the amount you list on the application, along with any other financial assistance you are eligible to receive, in preparing your financial aid package.

### Should I pay for help to fill out my FAFSA?

Various Web sites do offer help filing the FAFSA for a fee. These sites are **not** affiliated with, or endorsed by, the U.S. Department of Education. We urge you **not** to pay these sites for assistance that we provide for free. If you apply using *FAFSA on the Web* at [www.FAFSA.ed.gov](http://www.FAFSA.ed.gov), you get online instructions for each question, and you can "chat" live online with a customer service representative. Another source of free help is our online guide, *Completing the FAFSA*, at [www.FederalStudentAid.ed.gov/complefafsa](http://www.FederalStudentAid.ed.gov/complefafsa).

Whether you apply online or use the paper FAFSA, you can get free help by calling the Federal Student Aid Information Center at the telephone number(s) listed below or by contacting the financial aid administrator at your college.

Federal Student Aid Information Center:

**1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243)**  
**(TTY 1-800-730-8913)**

### Is there money available for graduate school?

Federal Student Aid has aid for graduate school, mostly in the form of loans. Here are some other places you should consider looking for funding:

- your school; most graduate schools offer teaching assistantships, fellowships, or other aid
- your state education agency, which you can find online at [www.ed.gov/Programs/bastmp/SHEA.htm](http://www.ed.gov/Programs/bastmp/SHEA.htm)
- the reference section of your school or public library
- the Internet (there is a free scholarship search at [www.FederalStudentAid.ed.gov](http://www.FederalStudentAid.ed.gov))



- foundations, religious organizations, community organizations, local businesses, and civic groups
- organizations (including professional associations) related to your field of interest
- ethnicity-based organizations
- your employer
- your state vocational rehabilitation agency (if appropriate); a list of state agencies is at [www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/rsa/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/rsa/index.html).

## ABOUT THE OIF/OEF/GWOT REVIEW

Welcome to the seventh issue of the “Operations Iraqi Freedom/Enduring Freedom Review” newsletter. Earlier issues are dated December 2003, June 2004, February 2005, September 2005, February 2006, and April 2007. VA’s Environmental Agents Service (EAS) publishes the “Review” to provide information about the concerns of certain veterans, specifically the Global War on Terror Heroes, who served in Operations Iraqi Freedom (primarily in Iraq), and Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, their families, and others interested in possible long-term health consequences of military service in Southwest Asia. The “Review” describes actions by VA and others to respond to these concerns. For past and current issues of the “Review” and additional information, see our web site at [www.va.gov/EnvironAgents](http://www.va.gov/EnvironAgents).

Beginning with Volume 4, Number 1 of the Review, audio files of news items will be available at our web site at [www.va.gov/EnvironAgents](http://www.va.gov/EnvironAgents), click on “Operation OIF/OEF”.

We encourage your comments or questions concerning the content of the “Review”. Please send suggestions and ideas for future issues of the newsletter to: Environmental Agents Service (131), VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20420.

Requests for additional copies of this and/or future issues also should be sent to the above address. A limited supply of the prior issues is available. Please specify the quantity and issue date requested.

*Questions about the Gulf War Registry examination, which is open for OIF veterans, should be directed to the Environmental Health Coordinator or Environmental Health Clinician at the nearest VA medical facility. The telephone number can be found in the local telephone directory under the “U.S. Government” listings. Assistance is also available from the toll-free VA Gulf War Helpline: 1-800-749-8387. VA benefit offices also have a great deal of information about VA benefit programs. The national toll-free telephone number is 1-800-827-1000.*

## HOW TO APPLY FOR DISABILITY COMPENSATION FROM VA

Like other veterans, OIF/OEF War veterans with service-connected illnesses or injuries are eligible for monthly payments, called disability compensation. The disability must have been incurred or aggravated during active military service. Furthermore, the military service of the veteran must have been terminated from military service through separation or discharge under conditions that were other than dishonorable.

Disability compensation varies according to the degree of disability and the number of dependents. Benefits are not subject to Federal or state income tax. Receipt of military retirement pay, disability severance pay, and separation incentive payments, known as SSB and VSI (Special Separation Benefits and Voluntary Separation Incentives), also affects the amount of VA compensation paid.

Disability ratings range from 0 to 100 percent (in increments of 10 percent). For example, in 2007, a veteran with a disability rating of 10 percent receives \$115 per month; a veteran with disability rating of 50 percent gets \$712 per month; and a veteran who is totally disabled and evaluated at 100 percent receives \$2,471 monthly.

Veterans with disability ratings between 30 and 100 percent also are eligible for monthly allowances for each dependent. (The amount depends on the disability rating).

A veteran who either is in need of regular aid and attendance of another person (including the veteran’s spouse), or who is permanently housebound may be entitled to additional benefits. VA must make that determination before the veteran can get these benefits.

### Must Apply To Be Considered

Veterans must apply separately for disability compensation. It is not provided automatically; nor does participation in a health registry substitute for filing a claim. VA veterans service representatives (VSR) can provide the necessary application and assist veterans who need help in completing it. VSRs are located at all VA Regional Offices, in most VA medical centers, and at most VA clinics. For help in locating a VSR near you, call the following toll-free telephone number: **1-800-827-1000**.

### Other Benefits

In addition to the compensation program described above, individual veterans may be eligible for the full range of other benefits offered by VA, including education and training, vocational rehabilitation, home loan guarantees, life insurance, pension, burial benefits, and more.

To learn more about VA's programs, OIF and OEF veterans and other interested parties can visit the VA home page [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) or call 1-800-827-1000. For additional information on other benefits programs, please check online at [www.vba.va.gov/benefit\\_facts/index.htm](http://www.vba.va.gov/benefit_facts/index.htm).

<b>Disability Compensation Rates for 2007</b>		
Percent Disabled	No Dependents	Veteran & Spouse
10%	\$115	-----
20%	\$225	-----
30%	\$348	\$389
40%	\$501	\$556
50%	\$712	\$781
60%	\$901	\$984
70%	\$1,135	\$1,232
80%	\$1,319	\$1,430
90%	\$1,483	\$1,608
100%	\$2,471	\$2,610

These rates became effective December 1, 2006 and were established by Congress. Veterans with disability ratings of at least 30 percent are eligible for additional allowances for dependents. Dependents include spouses, minor children, children between ages 18 and 23 who are attending school, children who are permanently incapable of self-support because of disabilities arising before age 18, and dependent parents. The additional amount depends on the disability rating.

Veterans with certain severe disabilities also may be eligible for additional special monthly compensation. For additional rate information, see compensation rate tables online at [www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Rates/comp01.htm](http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Rates/comp01.htm).

### **COMPENSATION FOR DISABLED MILITARY RETIREES**

*This is a summary of information published previously in the Review. It is presented again due to the interest voiced by readers. Additional information and application materials are available at: <http://www.defenselink.mil/prhome/mppcrsc.html>.*

The Department of Defense has two programs designed to reduce the reduction in retired pay due to receipt of Veteran Administration compensation, for certain disabled retirees.

Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) pays added benefits to retirees who receive VA disability compensation for combat-related disabilities and have 20 years of service.

Concurrent Retirement and Disability Payments (CRDP) provides a 10-year phase-out of the offset to military retired pay

due to receipt of VA disability compensation for members whose combined disability rating is 50% or greater. Members retired under disability provisions must have 20 years of service.

### **Combat Related Special Compensation I (CRSC)**

- Effective June 1, 2003, CRSC is payable to eligible retirees if they have combat-related condition(s) with a combined evaluation of at least 60 percent or conditions for which a Purple Heart was awarded.
- Guard and reserve retirees qualify for CRSC only if they performed duty equivalent to 20 full calendar years of service.

### **Combat Related Special Compensation II**

- Effective January 1, 2004, CRSC is payable to eligible retirees who have a combat-related VA disability rating of 10 percent or more.
- Guard and reservists need to have 20 years of qualifying service (supported by documentation from the applicable branch such as a 20-year letter, retirement orders, or a statement of service) to be eligible.
- Qualified reservists will not receive CRSC until they begin to receive retired pay at age 60.
- Combat Related Special Compensation Benefits
  - CRSC is not retired pay.
  - CRSC is tax exempt.
  - CRSC is not subject to garnishment for child support or alimony.

### **Concurrent Retirement Disability Pay (CRDP)**

Effective January 1, 2004, CRDP is payable to eligible retirees with a VA rating decision establishing service-connected disability of 50 percent or higher.

- Retirees with 20 or more years of active duty service, including service in the Guard and reserves, are eligible if they have a "20-year letter".
- Qualified reservists will not receive CRDP until they begin to receive retired pay at age 60.
- Eligibility is automatic for any month in which the retiree is entitled to a service-connected combined evaluation of 50 percent or higher.
- CRDP is a phased-in restoration of retired pay withheld from a retiree's account due to their receipt of VA compensation.
- CRDP is retired pay.
- CRDP is taxable.
- CRDP is subject to garnishment for child support or alimony.



Veterans must apply to their own branch of Service for Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) benefits. Applicants are urged to contact their own branch of Service for additional information.

**AIR FORCE**

HQ Air Force Personnel Center  
<https://ask.afpc.randolph.af.mil>  
**1.800.616.3775** toll-free (Select option 5, then option 1) or  
**210.565.1600**

**ARMY**

Army Human Resources Command  
[www.hrc.army.mil/site/crsc/index.html](http://www.hrc.army.mil/site/crsc/index.html)  
**1.866.281.3254** toll-free

**COAST GUARD**

Coast Guard Personnel Command (adm-1)  
[www.uscg.mil/hq/cgpc/adm/adm1.htm](http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cgpc/adm/adm1.htm)  
**1.866.307.1336** toll-free

**NAVY AND MARINE CORPS**

Naval Council of Personnel Boards  
[www.hq.navy.mil/ncpb/CRSCB/combatedrelated.htm](http://www.hq.navy.mil/ncpb/CRSCB/combatedrelated.htm)  
**1-877.366.2772** toll-free (prerecorded)

**ADDRESS CHANGES**

If this newsletter has your old address, please use this form to update our mailing list. Send the completed form to the OIF/OEF Review, Corporate Franchise Data Center, Austin Campus (200/397A), 1615 Woodward Street, Austin, TX 78772-0001. If you have access to the OIF/OEF Review via the VA Web site [www.va.gov/EnvironAgents](http://www.va.gov/EnvironAgents) and wish to discontinue receiving a copy by mail, please complete the form provided and return it to the Austin Automation Center. If you are receiving more than one copy of the newsletter, please let us know. Write to the address above. Please provide your name, address, and last four digits of your Social Security number. Thank you.

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**WHERE TO GET HELP**

(Due to a high volume of requests, this information has been updated as of July 2007 and repeated from earlier editions of the Review):

Active duty military personnel with questions or concerns about service in Southwest Asia: Contact your commanding officer or call the Department of Defense (DoD) Deployment Health Clinical Center **(1-800-796-9699)** for information. DoD also offers the “Direct Veterans Hotline,” with the toll-free number **1-800-497-6261**.

OIF veterans with concerns about their health should contact their nearest VA medical center. The telephone number can be found in your local telephone directory under Department of Veterans Affairs in the “U.S. Government” listings. Medical care is available, and a Gulf War Registry examination is also available on request for OIF veterans.

OIF and OEF veterans in need of marital/family counseling should contact the nearest VA medical center or VA Vet Center, also listed in your phonebook under Department of Veterans Affairs in the “U.S. Government” listings. For information about these programs, call **1-800-749-8387**. The Vet Centers welcome home and honor war veterans by providing quality readjustment services in a caring manner and by assisting them and their family members toward a successful post-war adjustment in or near their respective communities.

OIF and OEF veterans seeking disability compensation for illnesses incurred in or aggravated by military service can

contact a Veterans Benefits Counselor at the nearest VA regional office or health care facility at **1-800-827-1000**. You can also start a claim online at [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov).

Additional information about the wide range of benefit programs administered by VA should contact a Veterans Service Representative at the nearest VA regional office or health care facility or visit [www.vba.va.gov](http://www.vba.va.gov).

Representatives of veterans service organizations, including the American Legion (**1-800-433-3318**), Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (**1-800-VFW-1899**), and Disabled American Veterans (**1-877-426-2838**), have been very helpful to veterans, especially veterans who are seeking disability compensation. (These organizations are cited as examples. There are many other excellent organizations. VA does not endorse or recommend anyone group over another.)

County Veterans Service Officers also have been of great help to many military veterans seeking benefits they earned through their service to the Nation.

For additional Federal benefit information, see VA's Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents booklet. It is updated annually to reflect changes in law and policies. It is available for purchase from the U.S. Government Printing Office, Superintendent of Documents, Washington, DC 20402, Web site [bookstore.gpo.gov](http://bookstore.gpo.gov). VA's World Wide Web pages are updated throughout the year to present the most current information. The VA home page ([www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)) contains links to selections on compensation and pension benefits, health care benefits and services, burial and memorial benefits, and more.

## **MORE THAN 16,000 VETERANS TO BENEFIT FROM \$27 MILLION IN JOB TRAINING GRANTS**

Secretary of Labor Elaine L. Chao announced 94 grants, totaling nearly \$27 million, to provide approximately 17,000 veterans with job training to help them succeed in civilian careers. This June announcement described grants being awarded under the U.S. Department of Labor's Veterans' Workforce Investment Program (VWIP) and Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP).

"These \$27 million in grants will help more than 16,000 veterans access the resources they need to find good jobs and build a bright future for themselves and their families," said Secretary Chao.

Funds are being awarded on a competitive basis to state and local workforce investment boards, local public agencies and nonprofit organizations, including faith-based and community organizations. These agencies are familiar with the areas and populations to be served and have demonstrated that they can administer effective programs.

More than \$6.7 million will support 12 VWIP grants to help veterans from targeted groups overcome employment barriers and ease their transition into unsubsidized jobs. Through this program, veterans receive skills assessments, individual job counseling, labor market information, classroom or on-the-job training, skills upgrading and retraining, placement assistance and crucial follow-up services. The Labor Department's Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) expects these grants to provide training for more than 3,800 veterans, who may also be eligible for services through other Workforce Investment Act programs for economically disadvantaged or dislocated workers.

To assist homeless veterans with reintegration into America's workforce, the Labor Department is awarding more than \$20 million in 82 HVRP grants. These funds are being distributed nationwide through 35 newly competed grants and 47 current grants receiving second- and third-year funding. Homeless veterans may receive occupational, classroom and on-the-job training, as well as job search and placement assistance, including follow-up services. VETS expects these funds to help more than 12,600 veterans. HVRP is recognized as an extraordinarily efficient and effective program and is the only federal program that focuses exclusively on employment of veterans who are homeless.

The HVRP grants include two cooperative agreements that will assist in developing the HVRP National Technical Assistance Center. The center will provide technical assistance to current grantees, potential applicants and the public; gather grantee best practices, conduct employment-related research on homeless veterans; conduct regional grantee training sessions and self-employment boot camps; and perform outreach to the employer community to increase job opportunities for veterans.

Grantees under both programs network and coordinate their efforts with various local, state and federal social service providers. More information on the Department of Labor's unemployment and re-employment programs for veterans can be found at [www.dol.gov/vets](http://www.dol.gov/vets).

## **VA OPENING 38 NEW CLINICS WORLD-CLASS HEALTH CARE BROUGHT CLOSER TO MORE VETERANS**

To bring the world-class health care of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) closer to where veterans live, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson announced plans to open 38 new community-based clinics in 22 states.

"VA is committed to providing world-class health care to the men and women who have served this nation," Nicholson

said. “These new clinics will bring VA’s top-notch care closer to the veterans who have earned it.”

With 153 hospitals and about 700 community-based clinics, VA operates the largest integrated health care system in the country. VA’s health care budget of more than \$34 billion this year will provide health care to about 5.5 million people during nearly 800,000 hospitalizations and 60 million outpatient visits.

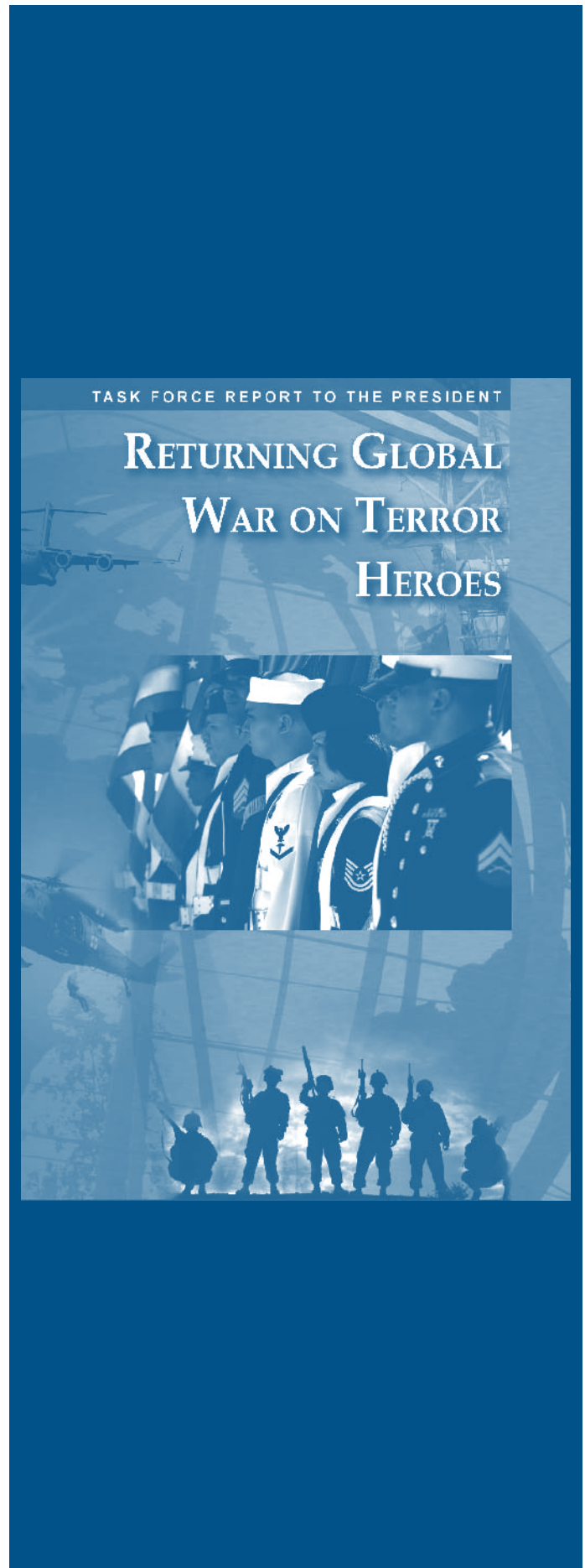
“Community-based medicine is better medicine,” said Dr. Michael Kussman, VA’s Under Secretary for Health. “It makes preventive care easier for patients, helps doctors have closer relationships with their patients and permits easier follow-ups for people with chronic problems.”

The new facilities, called community-based outpatient clinics, or CBOCs, will become operational by October 2008. Local VA officials will keep communities and their veterans informed of milestones in the creation of the new CBOCs.

A list of the new community clinics follows:

#### **VA’s Proposed Sites for New Outpatient Clinics**

Alabama -- Childersburg  
Arkansas -- Pine Bluff  
Florida -- Jackson and Putnam  
Georgia -- Camden and Stockbridge  
Idaho -- North Idaho  
Indiana -- Elkhart County and Knox  
Iowa -- Carroll, Cedar Rapids, Marshalltown and Shenandoah  
Kansas -- Hutchison  
Kentucky -- Berea, Daviess and Grayson County  
Maryland -- Andrews Air Force Base and Ft. Detrick  
Michigan -- Alpena County and Clare County  
Missouri -- Branson and Jefferson City  
Montana -- Cut Bank and Lewistown  
Nebraska -- Bellevue  
South Carolina -- Aiken and Spartanburg  
South Dakota -- Wagner and Watertown  
Ohio -- Hamilton and Parma  
Tennessee -- Hawkins and Madison  
Utah -- Western Salt Lake Valley  
Virginia -- Charlottesville  
Washington – To be determined  
West Virginia -- Monongalia







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July 2007