

1ST DISTRICT SERVICE OFFICER VA & R REPORT FOR MARCH 2021



By Richard Strehlow

Notes of Interest;

- 1- Did you know certain illnesses are associated with Gulf War service in the Southwest Asia theater of military operations from August 2, 1990, to present? Medically unexplained illnesses (also commonly referred to as Gulf War illness or chronic multi-symptom illness) are a significant concern for some veterans who served during the Gulf War.
- 2- Did you know according to many VA specialty law firms, hundreds, if not thousands of veterans are missing out on VA backpay benefits? And, the big problem is that many veterans have no idea they are missing out. Ideally, the VA should pay veterans money back to the effective date of the claim. Unfortunately, the VA often gives incorrect back dates. This results in veterans losing out on thousands of dollars.
- 3- Did you know a long-decried law dubbed the “widow's tax” that reduced the amount of cash support some surviving military spouses could receive each month will begin a planned phaseout this month? The so-called tax, officially known as the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) offset, impacted surviving spouses who qualified for both SBP annuity payments and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) allowances from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The law required the SBP payments to be reduced by the amount of the DIC payments. That’s because federal law prevented “double-dipping,” or receiving two separate federal benefits for the same reason.
- 4- Many veterans suffer from a group of disorders that fall under the category of parasomnias. According to the DSM-V, parasomnias are disorders characterized by abnormal behavioral, experiential, or physiological events occurring in association with sleep, specific sleep stages, or sleep-wake transactions. The most common parasomnias is “non-rapid eye movement” sleep arousal disorders and rapid eye movement sleep disorder. Coupled with PTSD, parasomnias can be potentially harmful to veterans.
- 5- Tinnitus, is a ringing, swishing, buzzing, or other type of noise that seems to originate in the ear or head. The sound may seem to come from one ear or both, from inside the head, or from a distance. It may be constant or intermittent, steady or pulsating. Most tinnitus is subjective, meaning that only you can hear the noise, while those around you cannot.
- 6- Did you know veterans organizations play a significant role in helping veterans gain access to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) programs and benefits? Veterans organizations also have dozens of programs that serve the needs of their local communities. Only about 20% of veterans belong to a veterans organization. Your American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), Disabled American Veterans (DAV), and AMVETS and others need more members.
- 7- The Department of Veterans Affairs has announced that it is cutting red tape for veterans by eliminating the need for them to complete an annual Eligibility Verification Report (EVR). VA will implement a new process for confirming eligibility for benefits, and staff that had been responsible for processing the old form will instead focus on eliminating the compensation claims backlog. All beneficiaries currently receiving VA pension benefits will receive a letter from VA explaining these

changes and providing instructions on how to continue to submit their unreimbursed medical expenses.

- 8- A new study of more than 300,000 Vietnam-era U.S. veterans has found that those who were exposed to Agent Orange are nearly twice as likely to develop dementia as those who were not. The new finding, published Monday in JAMA Neurology, is among the most substantial to date linking cognitive decline with chemicals used for defoliation during the Vietnam War.
- 9- Ahead of the Biden administration's rollout of its fiscal 2022 federal budget, veterans advocates are calling for an \$11 billion increase in the Department of Veterans Affairs budget to address what they view as shortfalls in health care and benefits services. Three organizations -- Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America and Veterans of Foreign Wars -- released their annual VA "independent budget" Monday, an assessment of veterans' needs heading into the fiscal 2022 congressional budget deliberations process. No VA Loan Limits in 2020 Check Eligibility The report is an "attempt to produce an honest assessment of need" not subject to the "politics of federal budget development and negotiations that inevitably have led to continuous funding deficits," the authors wrote.
- 10- Did you know the United States fought secret wars in Laos and Cambodia, dropping large quantities of Agent Orange in each of those countries? According to one estimate, the U.S. dropped 475,500 gallons of Agent Orange in Laos and 40,900 in Cambodia. Because Laos and Cambodia were neutral during the Vietnam War, the U.S. attempted to keep secret its wars, including its bombing campaigns against those countries, from the American population and has largely avoided compensating American veterans and CIA personnel stationed in Cambodia and Laos who suffered permanent injuries as a result of exposure to Agent Orange there.



Please Remember..... That all gave some, but many gave all!