



# Veterans' Update

Your quarterly newsletter on Veterans' Issues from  
Congresswoman Ginny Brown-Waite

July, 2006

Greetings,

The Veterans' Update is a newsletter created to keep you abreast of issues and legislation important to the veterans of Florida's 5<sup>th</sup> Congressional District. I hope that you find this issue informative and educational. If you need any help with the benefits or care you receive from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), please do not hesitate to contact my Brooksville district office at 1-866-G-WAITE-5.

Sincerely,



Rep. Ginny Brown-Waite

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*This mailing was prepared, published, and mailed at taxpayer expense.  
It is provided as a service to 5<sup>th</sup> Congressional District constituents.*



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M.C.  


## **NEW PURPLE HEART HALL OF HONOR TO OPEN SOON – SEND YOUR STORIES TODAY**

As you may have heard, a new facility is under construction to permanently house the stories and mementos of thousands of Purple Heart recipients from around the nation. The National Purple Heart Hall of Honor, a 7,500 square foot facility being constructed in New York State, will share the stories of America's combat wounded veterans and those who never came back, all recipients of the Purple Heart.

Since 1932, over one million members of the military from all walks of life earned this medal in service to the nation. Their stories will be preserved and shared through exhibits, live and videotaped interviews with the veterans themselves, and the Roll of Honor, an interactive computer program preserving the stories of each individual. Guests will also have the opportunity to leave messages of thanks for veterans to read. A video recording studio will allow veterans or surviving family members to add their stories to the historic record, while a contemplative courtyard will provide a quiet space to reflect on the lives touched by these women and men.



**Image of the Purple Heart**

If you are a Purple Heart Recipient, or know someone who is, you can make sure their story will be preserved by contacting my office at (352) 799-8354 or toll-free at (866) 492-4835. One of my staff members will be happy to send you a form where you can fill out your name and personal story, proof of receipt (a DD-214 discharge certificate or equivalent), as well as any photographs and personal mementos that will help tell each recipient's story. I will then make sure that the National Purple Heart Hall of Honor receives your unique story and learns of your bravery and service to our nation.

## **DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS ANNOUNCES THAT THE STOLEN LAPTOP WAS FOUND INTACT AND THAT YOUR PERSONAL INFORMATION WAS NOT ACCESSED**

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary James Nicholson recently announced that the laptop storing the sensitive information of over 26 million veterans and military personnel was recovered and is undergoing forensic investigations to determine whether or not the information was duplicated. The Federal Bureau of Investigation has said that it appears that data was not accessed.

I am cautiously optimistic that all veterans can breathe a sigh of relief now that the laptop has been found. The even better news is that it appears that none of your personal information on the laptop was compromised. Now the focus must turn to what can be done to prevent similar losses from occurring in the future.

The House Veterans' Affairs Committee has already held five hearings on data security at the VA, and I look forward to working with Chairman Buyer and Ranking Member Evans to craft comprehensive legislation that addresses the inherent problems with cyber-security at the Department of Veterans Affairs. Veterans like you have already proved your mettle in battle and in service to our great nation. Hand wringing and worrying about whether or not your privacy has been violated is not what you deserve for your sacrifices.

Additionally, the VA is planning to provide one year of free credit monitoring to people whose sensitive personal information may have been stolen in the incident. Once the VA hires a credit monitoring company, you will receive a detailed letter in the mail that explains credit monitoring and how eligible people can enroll or "opt-in" for the service. The VA expects to have the service in place and the letters mailed by mid-August.

## **FY 2007 DISABILITY COLA TO LIKELY INCREASE 2.6%**

As the price of milk, bread and cereal increases with inflation, so must your income. For those of us in the workforce, we hope that by meeting our goals and working hard in the office, we get a raise at the end of the year. For those veterans who cannot work – those with service-connected disabilities and their families – the annual COLA helps cover the cost of inflation and lets veterans maintain the lifestyle they have earned and deserve.

On June 26, 2006, the U.S. House passed H.R. 4843, legislation that grants a cost of living adjustment to our nation's veterans. It is estimated that for FY 2007 this increase will be 2.6%. H.R. 4843 directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to increase, as of December 1, 2006, the rates of disability compensation for 2.6 million veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation paid to more than 340,000 spouses and dependent children of service-disabled veterans.

As a proud Member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee and a co-sponsor of H.R. 4843, I was honored to vote for yet another COLA for our men and women who served our nation. Each year our Committee works with veteran's service organizations to craft a budget that meets the needs of all American veterans. The annual COLA increase is an integral part of many veterans' incomes and deserves to be raised again this year. I will continue to monitor the progress of H.R. 4843 as it is considered by the U.S. Senate until it is signed into law by President Bush.



**Thousands of Military Men and Women  
Call Home Each Month to Speak to Loved  
Ones, Family and Friends**

### **THE INTERNET HELPS SOLDIERS DEPLOYED OVERSEAS COMMUNICATE WITH LOVED ONES BACK HOME**

Unlike previous wars when it took months for handwritten letters to cross the Atlantic, today's military men and women can communicate almost daily with friends and loved ones.

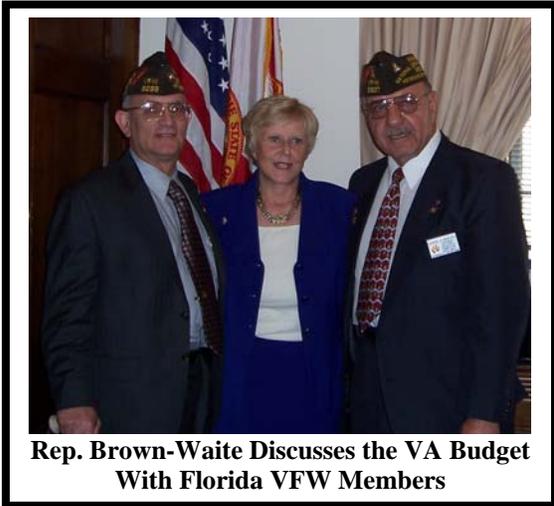
Soldiers have free access to the non-secure military Internet, even when they are aboard ships at sea. Soldiers also have free Internet access at Internet cafes in approximately 185 locations in Iraq, which include mobile sites, and 32 locations in Afghanistan. Soldiers typically download music, photos, and streaming live video to see the latest news of their children and family.

As you might guess, the Internet has made a great difference in the lives of hundreds of thousands of soldiers stationed far away from home and their families. Instead of waiting months or even years to hear their child's voice or see a video of a school play, today's soldiers can be more involved in their lives back home than ever.

## **Helping Disabled Veterans Find the Housing They Deserve**

With thousands of Florida men and women serving in the Global War on Terror, it is incumbent upon Congress to provide for their health care, mental health and quality of life needs upon their return. This includes finding appropriate housing for those brave soldiers who have been injured in combat. The Veterans' Housing Opportunity and Benefits Act of 2006 helps severely disabled veterans of the Global War on Terror recover from their injuries and regain their independence. The bill to help disabled veterans and their families carried the unanimous approval of the House of Representatives and the Senate and was recently signed into law by President Bush.

This new law provides adaptive assistance grants to veterans residing temporarily in homes owned by a family member. Grants range from \$2,000 to \$14,000 and a veteran may receive up to three such grants within the maximum amount.



Many of those wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan spend time convalescing at a family home before moving on to a home of their own. Previously, the Department of Veterans Affairs could not help adapt family homes to meet the unique needs of veterans, unless the veteran had an ownership interest in the home.

The new law also permits servicemembers who are rated totally disabled to receive post-separation Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) free of charge for up to two years through 2011. Servicemembers insured by SGLI can then convert to Veterans' Group Life Insurance or a commercial policy.

Providing totally disabled servicemembers with insurance that can be converted to low-cost Veterans' Group Life Insurance is important because many veterans who return home injured may not be able to qualify for affordable commercial insurance.

The new law also provides additional healthcare insurance protections for servicemembers who are called to active duty by expanding reinstatement of insurance provisions and limiting premium increases.

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