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GINNY BROWN-WAITE

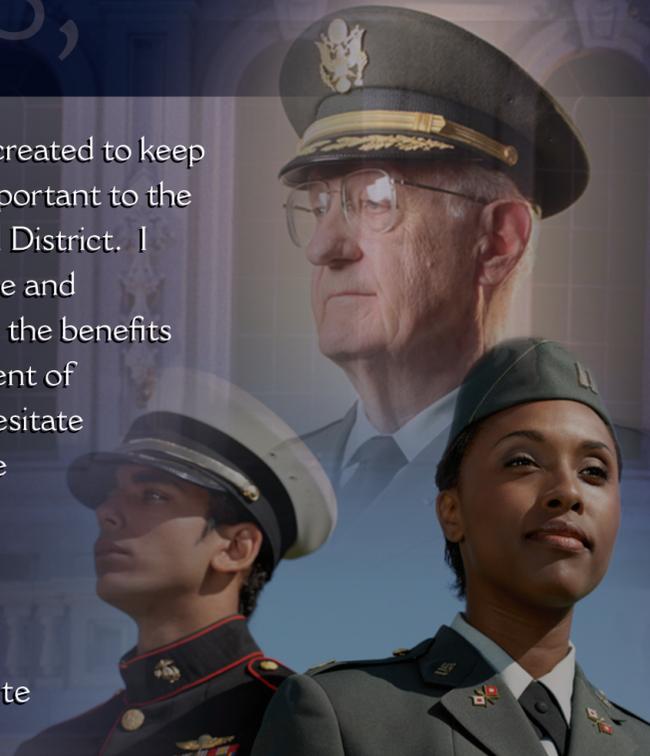
GREETINGS,

The Veterans' Update is a newsletter created to keep you abreast of issues and legislation important to the veterans of Florida's 5th 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 toll-free at (866) 492-4835.

Sincerely,

GINNY BROWN-WAITE

Rep. Ginny Brown-Waite





CONGRESSWOMAN

Ginny Brown-Waite

Veterans' Update

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

BROOKSVILLE VA CLINIC EXPANSION GRAND OPENING COMING IN JANUARY

With an ever increasing veteran population in Hernando County, the Pinebrook Community Based Outpatient Clinic in Brooksville needed a significant expansion to meet veteran demands. Having already been successful tripling the size of the existing clinic when I first came to Congress, I continued to put pressure on the Veterans Administration to expand it even further. The good news is that the VA authorized a significant addition to the facility and we will celebrate the grand opening in January.

With another 1,700 square feet expansion, the clinic will provide a shifting of administrative and other functions, allowing for additional/multiple provider examination and treatment rooms. Workloads can also be increased since additional "provider scheduling slots" will be available. The grand opening for the expanded facilities will be held this year in mid-January. Look for an announcement in the newspaper or contact my office toll-free at 866-492-4835 for more information.

GINNY RE-INTRODUCES LEGISLATION TO MANDATE VETERANS RECEIVE HEALTH CARE APPOINTMENTS WITHIN THIRTY DAYS

Earlier this year I introduced H.R. 92, the *Veterans Timely Access to Health Care Act*. Under the bill, if a veteran cannot get an appointment with a primary care physician within 30 days, that veteran may see a private physician at no additional cost.

I hear from men and women throughout the district who are frustrated with the amount of time they have to wait before their VA physician can see them. The good news is that these complaints are far fewer than when I first came to Congress, as the average wait time for health care visits in my district has dropped from more than 90 days to under 30 days. While this is a great improvement, more can be done for veterans seeking health care from the VA.

H.R. 92 makes it clear that the priority should be getting veterans access to health care, and not where that care is received. If a veteran can't get in to see the local VA doctor within 30 days, it only makes sense that the veteran should be able to see a non-VA physician and get the treatment they need. This issue is strictly about care and it should not matter where a veteran receives that care as long as the care is of the highest quality and in a reasonable amount of time. I know the Veterans Health Administration provides some of the best care out there, but unfortunately, for some veterans it just takes too long to see a physician. My bill, legislation that puts veterans first, has yet to be considered by the Democrat controlled Veterans' Affairs Committee.



Ginny and Local Veterans Discuss Efforts to Reduce Wait Times at CBOCs Across America

VIETNAM VETERANS COULD GET FUTURE HELP TREATING HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

For Vietnam veterans who served in-country between 1962 and 1975, efforts are under way to help with treatment for hypertension, otherwise known as high blood pressure. Earlier this summer the Institute of Medicine, a part of the National Academies, published a study that suggested a link between Agent Orange exposure during Vietnam and high blood pressure.

While the study only showed “limited or suggestive evidence of an association,” Veteran Service Officer employees are requesting that veterans who served in-country during the 1962-1975 campaign meet with their local VSO to log their disease in case the VA decides to provide future benefits based on this suggestive link. Please note that at this time the VA is not granting benefits based on the study. The suggestion to log your hypertension today is so that if benefits are given in the future the veteran will already be logged into the system and the claim will be adjudicated faster. Please feel free to contact me toll-free at 866-492-4835 for more information.

VETERANS DAY PASSES WITH STILL NO ACTION FROM THE MAJORITY TO PROVIDE NECESSARY FUNDING FOR AMERICA’S HEROES

Given that it is now late November, I had hoped that I would be able to inform you of the tremendous budget increases passed in the House version of the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill this year. However, despite promises from the Democrat leadership in both chambers to veterans and veteran organizations alike, we still have not sent the needed appropriations for veterans to the President so that it may be enacted into law.

The Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill passed the House on June 15, 2007 on a bipartisan vote of 409-2. Yet despite this strong showing of support from both sides of the aisle, leaders in charge of setting the agenda have held up a final vote on veterans’ appropriations in order to push through other unrelated and expensive spending measures.

Actions like these are not what veterans across the nation need. There are funds in the bill to hire more VA staff, increase funding for PTSD treatment, mental health care, and to start constructing the new Orlando VA hospital. Whether Democrats like it or not, we are a nation at war. As Representatives, we should be doing everything in our power to give our troops and veterans what they need and deserve.

Veterans’ healthcare must not be kept waiting for legislative action the same way veterans’ appropriations have been this year. As your Member of Congress, I promise to continue to fight until all veterans receive the access to healthcare they deserve.

CITRUS COUNTY VSO TESTIFIES BEFORE HOUSE VETERANS’ AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Citrus County VSO Officer J.J. Kenney recently testified before the House Veterans’ Affairs Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee on which I serve as Ranking Member. Having worked with J.J. for many years, I invited him to testify so other Members on the Subcommittee could hear his views on disparities in disability awards for veterans.

In his testimony, J.J. identified two main reasons for the disparities in disability awards amongst each of the states; the human element and the need for more regional offices to examine claims.

As one might imagine, when you have many VSOs in different states examining veterans with similar conditions, you are bound to get different outcomes. Unfortunately, when veterans apply for disability determinations that may help



Ginny and J.J. Kenney Discuss Legislation to Correct Veteran Disability Award Disparities

them receive important medical care, these varied outcomes can have negative consequences for the veteran and their dependents. The Subcommittee was very interested in hearing J.J.'s insight on the issue, and will continue to find ways to ensure the VSO employees receive the comprehensive standardized training that will help veterans receive the proper disability rating.

His second point, and one I have brought up repeatedly to the Committee and the VA, is the burgeoning veteran population in Florida, without a commensurate increase in VA regional offices. California, Florida and Texas have the three largest veteran populations in the nation, but only have six regional offices between them (three in California, one in Florida and two in Texas). With more than 1.7 million veterans in Florida alone, it is highly unlikely that the single regional office is able to consistently determine veteran disability cases over time and over regional jurisdictions. I will continue my efforts on the Veterans' Affairs Committee to find funding for another regional office for Florida so that veterans can have their cases dealt with quickly, fairly and accurately.

VA RETRO PROGRAM – DISABLED MILITARY RETIREE RETROACTIVE PAY

On September 1, 2006, the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) and the Department of Veterans Affairs finalized plans for disabled military retiree retroactive pay, commonly called the VA Retro program. This program is designed to pay eligible military retirees any retroactive money due as a result of increases in their percentage of disability. These payments include adjustments to Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC), Concurrent Retirement and Disability Payments (CRDP), and VA disability compensation. Individual amounts will vary based on differences in disability amount and length of retroactive period.

No action is required by the retiree to initiate the VA Retro investigation. The VA is providing DFAS with the eligible retiree Social Security Number. Both organizations are working together to provide eligible retirees with their full entitlements to both VA compensation and CRSC or CRDP.

As of August 2007, over 98,000 cases have been processed or about 75 percent of the original 133,000 cases. To date, the VA has paid \$133 million and DFAS has paid \$28 million with the average payment being \$1,638. While the majority of cases have been completed, DFAS and the VA are now processing what are considered to be the more complex accounts, which explains the delays for some retirees. These involve multiple VA rating adjustments, shifts by retirees between CRDP and CRSC, ex-spouse pay entitlements, and other issues that require lengthy record searches.

If you are having problems with your VA Retro claim, please feel free to contact my office toll-free at 866-492-4835.

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<http://brown-waite.house.gov>

Also, be sure to sign up on my Congressional Web site to receive my weekly e-newsletter. All you need to do is submit your name and e-mail address to receive it each Friday.