



The Guardian

The Newsletter of the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services

February, 2016

2016 Legislature Begins; Military Retiree Income Tax Exemption Bill Re-Introduced for 11th Straight Year

The 2016 New Mexico Legislature convened at noon on January 18—and with the pounding of the gavels by Lieutenant Governor John Sanchez and House Speaker **Don Tripp**, there's hope in the veteran community that a long-sought state income tax exemption on military retiree pension income will finally make it to the governor's desk.

Uniformed Service Retiree Tax Deduction (SB-16)

For the eleventh consecutive year, a bill has been introduced seeking such an exemption.

This year, State Senator William Burt (R-Otero) along with State Representative David Adkins (R-Bernalillo) have introduced SB-16, the Uniformed Service Retiree Tax Deduction Act.



State Sen. William Burt
(R-Otero)

The bill, similar to versions sponsored by Senator Burt the previous two years, seeks a phased-in deduction on military retiree income—beginning with a 25% exemption on income beginning on January 1, 2017, a 50% deduction beginning January 1, 2018, a 75% deduction beginning January 1, 2019, and a 100% deduction after January 1, 2020.

To soothe the fears of losing state tax revenue, this year's bill features a cap of \$25,000. Pension income exceeding the \$25,000 mark would be subjected to normal state income tax regulations.



State Rep. David Adkins
(R-Bernalillo)

As with previous versions of the bill, any income derived from post-military careers would **not** be exempted and would still be subjected to normal state income and business taxes.

The New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services strongly supports SB-16. The agency argues it is actually an **economic** bill and makes good business sense for the state because it would attract more military retirees to move to New Mexico.

The NMDVS also believes the bill would entice retirees from the state's four military bases (Kirtland Air Force Base, Cannon AFB, Holloman AFB and White Sands Missile Range) to remain in New Mexico. According to data provided to the NMDVS by Kirtland AFB, more than 90% of its "in-state" retirees leave New Mexico upon retirement.

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According to the U.S Department of Defense (DoD) and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), **the average age of today's recent military retirees is forty-six**; too young to fully retire, but a prime age to start post-military careers as a well-trained employee--or better yet, the owner of a small business which in turn would create more jobs.

“Unless a man or woman is a general, admiral or other senior officer, a typical military retiree won't have sufficient pension income to live off of,” said NMDVS Secretary Jack Fox. **“They will need to find a job;** probably start their own business to do so. We want to attract these retirees to New Mexico, to start these second careers. They have discipline, management skills, and are technically savvy—traits that are perfect for the work force. We need to bring these people here—as well as hang on to those that have already **been trained in New Mexico.”**

Secretary Fox also points out that all retirees bring with them other VA-paid benefits—more than \$1.4 billion worth of pension/compensation payments to retirees—along with health care, education (GI Bill), and construction costs.

SB-316 has received its first two Senate committee assignments. It must pass both committees before being voted on by the full senate. If it passes the senate, the bill would then be sent to the House—where it will also be assigned for debate and passage in committees before being voted on by the full House.

If **SB-16 passes the House without changes, it will then be sent to Governor Susana Martinez's desk to be signed into state law.** The 2016 New Mexico Legislature adjourns at noon on February 18.

NMDVS Secretary Fox Takes Part in *Alliance/Senior Day* at the Legislature



New Mexico Department of Veterans Services Secretary Jack Fox led the Pledge of Allegiance at Alliance/Senior Day at the Legislature on January 20 in the State Capitol Rotunda.

Secretary Fox then had the opportunity to address the crowd as the first of several guest speakers at the annual event to promote senior issues throughout the state. Shortly after introducing himself, Secretary Fox asked for a show of hands from all veterans in attendance. More than half in the crowd raised their hands.

In his remarks, he mentioned—much to the surprise of many in attendance—that according to the VA, **74% of New Mexico's veterans are over the age of 50.** He stressed the importance of senior veterans enrolling with the VA Health Care System.

“New Mexico has one of the finest VA hospitals and health care systems in the nation-- but you can't receive treatment there if you're not enrolled with the VA,” said Secretary Fox. **“If you haven't enrolled yet, come see us. We'll get you signed up so that you can access these benefits—which, by the way, you have all *earned* through your service to our country. Don't wait til it's too late; stop by one of our offices or give us a call and make an appointment.”** *(see back page for locations and contact information for all NMDVS field offices)*

Active Duty Service Members, Veterans to be Honored at Legislature on February 15



Men and women who are serving or have served our country as members of the United States Armed Forces will be honored on ***Military and Veterans Day at the 2016 Legislature*** on Monday, February 15 at the State Capitol in Santa Fe.

Special focus this year will be on the men and women of the New Mexico National Guard--and the 100th anniversary of its first federal activation **as a militarized unit when these first “citizen soldiers” were sent to the Mexican border to pursue Pancho Villa** after he and his men raided the town of Columbus in the southern part of our state.

New Mexico Department of Veterans’ Services Secretary Jack Fox and New Mexico Adjutant General Andrew Salas will lead a tribute at an 11am ceremony in the Capitol Rotunda honoring the service and sacrifice of our Guard members and all men and women who have served in the military. The Choral Arts Society of St. Michaels High School from Santa Fe--fresh off a performance from Carnegie Hall in New York—will also perform a pre-ceremony selection of songs.



The public is invited to join current and former members of the military to celebrate and honor our military community. In addition, there will be informational tables staffed by more than two dozen military, veterans and community service organizations from 9am-1pm in the east and west wings of the Capitol Rotunda.

Military & Veterans’ Day at the Legislature is the annual day during the legislative session presented by the New Mexico Departments of **Veterans’ Services and Military Affairs/New Mexico National Guard** to

honor and thank active-duty service members and veterans for their sacrifice and service for our country. Veterans and active-duty personnel are also encouraged to attend the Legislature to see the legislative process in action--and meet their legislators to discuss any of their own legislative concerns.

For more information, contact NMDVS Event Planner & Coordinator Josetta Rodriguez at josetta.rodriguez@state.nm.us.



*(photos are from previous
“Military & Veterans Day
at the Legislature”
ceremonies)*



Acting VA Undersecretary of Benefits, Lt. Governor Sanchez Attend 1st Quarterly VSO Meeting of 2016



Acting VA Undersecretary for Benefits Danny Pummill made a surprise visit to the first quarterly meeting of state veterans' service organizations and community partner organizations presented by the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services on January 13 in Albuquerque.

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Acting Undersecretary for Benefits Danny Pummill made a surprise visit to the first quarterly meeting of State Veterans Service Organization/Community Partner Agency leaders hosted by the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services on January 13 in Albuquerque.

Undersecretary Pummill was in downtown Albuquerque for a meeting at the VA Regional Office (VARO) and heard about the VSO/community partner meeting—and decided to stop by to, in his words, “meet -and-greet these veterans groups, and see if I could sneak in a word or two.”

When he showed up at the New Mexico Veterans Memorial, NMDVS Secretary Jack Fox, who was speaking when Undersecretary Pummill arrived, gladly gave up the microphone.

Undersecretary Pummill thanked the organizations for their hard work on behalf of veterans, and assured them the VA is working hard to do its share “...as part of the deal.”

“We understand your complaints about the long delays and backlog involving the paperwork many of you have sent to us. We hear you. We *get it--and we are moving on it, I can assure you this,*” said Undersecretary Pummill. “The new VA leadership has made it the top priority to better help you help the veterans you have serviced.”

Undersecretary Pummill said that as recently as a few years ago, there was a backlog of more than 800,000 claims backlogged at the VA—but that the number is now down to about 80,000. He also said that in Fiscal Year 2015, more than 1.4 million claims were processed—an increase of about 500% compared to three years ago. These claims, he said, paid out more than \$92 billion—an increase of \$40 billion from three years ago.

“We’ve made a lot of progress, sure. But we still have a lot of work to do,” said Undersecretary Pummill. “We’ll keep working at it. It’s why I’m putting off retirement—to clear the backlog.”

New Mexico VA Health Care System Director Andrew Welch also addressed the more than three dozen VSO/community partner agency leaders. Director Welch provided an updated on some key construction projects scheduled for the facility.

“We’re very excited about what’s going to be going on at the VA hospital campus,” he said. “We have a \$6 million renovation Primary Care Department project that should be finished this fall. We’ll also be expanding our Acute Psychiatric Care Clinic, and will be adding a Dental Clinic. And, you’ll be happy to hear that we’ve been approved for the design phase of a new multi-level parking facility.”

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Lieutenant Governor John Sanchez, who was the first speaker at the meeting, provided some assuring words for veterans when he said he will be hard at work on their behalf at the 2016 New Mexico Legislature.

“With so many legislators, you can never predict how the session will turn out for any bills introduced in the legislature,” said the Lt. Governor. “But I come from a family with a strong history of military service. Veterans have always been important to me, so I will guarantee you this: I will personally lobby on your behalf in the Senate to get SB-16 (*see page 1*) and all veteran-related bill passed on the Senate floor. You can count on this.”

The meetings are presented by the NMDVS in order to brief state veterans service organizations and community agencies on the latest veterans issues in New Mexico and nationwide—and as a chance for agencies to network. At each quarterly meeting, selected agencies are provided the opportunity to give updates on events, achievements and other happenings.



New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services Secretary Jack Fox introduces Lt. Governor John Sanchez (right) at the start of the state VSO/community partners meeting on January 13 at the New Mexico Veterans Memorial.



New Mexico VA Health Care System Director Andrew Welch addressed the crowd and answered questions at the January 13 briefing of state VSO/community partners meeting on January 13 at the New Mexico Veterans Memorial.



Lieutenant Governor John Sanchez (center, in dark suit) took time to chat with veterans service organization/community partner agency leaders after speaking at the January 13 briefing.



New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services Secretary Jack Fox (left) presents a New Mexico Veterans' Coin to Acting VA Undersecretary for Benefits Danny Pummill after the Undersecretary's remarks at the January 13

Departing NM National Guard Troops Given Sendoff at “Yellow Ribbon” Ceremony



(LEFT PHOTO) Governor Susana Martinez (*kneeling, in red dress*) and New Mexico National Guard Secretary Jack Fox (*far right, standing*) were on hand for a *Yellow Ribbon Send-Off Ceremony* for the **New Mexico National Guard’s 126th MP Company** on January 4 in Albuquerque. The unit is heading to Kuwait in support Operation Spartan Shield to perform various customs inspection team missions—including inspecting cargo maritime and air ports throughout the Middle East.

(RIGHT PHOTO) Among those being deployed are 1SG Lacey Macias and his daughter, SPC Krista, a medic. It’s the **third and final deployment for 1SG Macias**—but the first time both have deployed together. Her mother Rebecca (*at left*) is a former U.S. Army medic who was stationed in Korea.

Memorial Service Held for Albuquerque Native Killed in Action in Afghanistan

Hundreds of family, friends and grateful citizens of New Mexico attended a memorial service for U.S. Sergeant 1st Class Matthew McClintock on January 31 at the Kiva Auditorium in downtown Albuquerque.

SFC McClintock, a graduate of Eldorado High School in Albuquerque, was killed in action when his unit came under intense enemy fire in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, on January 5. The 30-year old was serving his third combat duty tour after enlisting with the Army in 2006 as an infantryman and was serving with the 1st Battalion, 19th Special Forces Group (Airborne), based in Buckley, Washington.

He was promoted from Staff Sergeant to Sergeant First Class posthumously.

Governor Susana Martinez and New Mexico Department of Veterans’ Services Secretary Jack Fox were among those honoring and paying tribute at the memorial service. SFC McClintock is survived by his wife Alexandra and infant son Declan—both of whom live in the suburban Seattle, WA area. He will be interred at the National Cemetery in Arlington later this spring.



SFC Matthew McClintock
*(with three-month-old son
Declan)*



Governor Susana Martinez and her husband Chuck Franco pay their respects at a memorial to U.S. Army SFC Matthew McClintock on January 31 at the Kiva Auditorium in Albuquerque.

SFC Matthew McClintock's mother, Joyce Montoya of Albuquerque (in green sweater) and his wife Alexandra (to the left of Ms. Montoya) and other family members accept condolences at the January 31 memorial service.



New Mexico National Guard Adjutant General Andrew Salas (center) offers a consoling hug to Alexandra McClintock, widow of fallen U.S. Army SFC Matthew McClintock. The McClintocks have a three-month-old son, Declan.

Kevin Williams recall his funny, caring and patriotic older brother at the January 31 memorial service for U.S. Army SFC Matthew McClintock, whose picture is in front of the podium.

NMDVS Names New State Benefits Director



Dale Movius

NMDVS State Benefits Director

The New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services has promoted Dale Movius to the position of State Benefits Director.

Dale will be based in the NMDVS main office in the Bataan Memorial Building in downtown Santa Fe. He had been serving as one of the agency's Veterans' Service Officers in Albuquerque since being hired in March of 2014—helping veterans, widows and eligible dependents with the often-complex process of filing for their VA and state veterans' benefits. In his new role, Dale will work with agency's Secretary and Deputy Secretary to oversee its state benefits division—including striving to identify additional benefits for our state's 170,132 veterans, and to bring these to the attention to state legislators for passage into state law.

"We are excited to welcome Dale into our Santa Fe operations in his new position," said NMDVS Secretary Jack Fox. "Dale brings a lot of enthusiasm and a wealth of knowledge about veterans issues to his new role. His expertise can now benefit the entire veteran community in our state."

Prior to coming to the NMDVS, Dale worked for two years for Presbyterian Medical Services as the Program Coordinator for a grant which established a Veterans' Jail Diversion Program in the Albuquerque Metro Area. Before this, he served as the Department Service Officer for the American Legion in his home state of Washington. He is also a U.S. Air Force veteran, serving as an Integrated Avionics Technician on F-111A, D, F, G, and F-15E aircraft before retiring as a Master Sergeant in 1996.

Dale can be contacted at dalej.movius@state.nm.us or (505) 827-6374.

NMDVS Service Officer Helps Arrange School Valentines' Day Surprise for Student

New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services Silver City-based Veterans Service Officer Bradley Brock and his girlfriend Laura Brown helped provide a very special pre-Valentine's Day surprise on January 26 for five-year old Kindergarten student Carylon Zollinger (*holding the Valentine heart in photo*).

Brock and Brown spent the day before preparing and decorating the stage for a surprise visit by Carylon's father, U.S. Army SPC Mark Zollinger, who was home for ten days from service in Afghanistan.

It was all part of a pre-Valentine's Day assembly at G.W. Stout Elementary school. Carylon went on stage to pose for what she thought was a Valentine's Day family picture to be sent to her dad—whom she thought was in Afghanistan. But moments later, SPC Zollinger came out from behind the decorations—to the complete shock of Carylon. Her mom Laci (*holding 19-month-old son Traydon*) was "in" on the surprise.



(photo courtesy: Randal Seyler/Silver City Sun News)

"The look on Carylon's face was priceless," said Brock, whose girlfriend Laura is her teacher. "We were so glad to pitch in to help make this happen. It was awesome."

Help for Entrepreneurial-Minded Veterans at Free Workshops in Shiprock, Las Vegas (NM)



Military veterans, Guard/Reserve and transitioning active-duty service members interested in starting their own business or expanding an existing operation are invited to attend free business development lunch workshops in Shiprock on February 25 and Las Vegas, NM, on March 9. The February 25 workshop in Shiprock is from 11:30am-1pm at Diné College in the South Campus Library's Senator John Pinto Auditorium, located at BIA Road 570 (next to Shiprock High School).

The March 9 workshop in Las Vegas, NM, is also from 1130am-1pm at Serf Theater Hall, located at 707 Douglas Avenue. Spouses are also invited to both workshops. A free hot lunch will be provided for all at both workshops.

Among the topics to be covered are: How to determine if a business idea is feasible, available financial assistance for veterans, special business incentives for New Mexico veterans, how to create a Business Plan, how to pursue government contracting possibilities, veteran-friendly franchise opportunities, and other ways the VBOC and the presenting partner agencies can help a veteran business owner. As an added bonus following both workshops, attendees can take advantage of private on-site “walk-in” business counseling sessions for more personal assistance.

The workshops are part of the ongoing *VBOC On the Rez* and *On The Road* series of business development workshops for veterans presented by the New Mexico Veterans' Business Outreach Center (VBOC), the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services, the U.S. Small Business Administration, the New Mexico Small Business Development Center (SBDC), the SBDC Procurement Technical Assistance Program (PTAP), and Wells Fargo Bank.

Though both workshops are similar in their goals, the *VBOC On the Rez* series of workshops is customized for Native American veterans and transitioning service members—offering additional information about programs and services specifically for Native American veterans and non-veterans who are interested in opening or expanding a small business.

The American Indian Chamber of Commerce of New Mexico, the American Indian Procurement Technical Assistance Center, and the Shiprock Regional Business Development Office are also co-sponsors for the February 25 lunch workshop in Shiprock. The Las Vegas/San Miguel County Chamber of Commerce is a co-sponsor of the March 9 lunch workshop in Las Vegas.

Walk-ins are welcome at both workshops--but pre-registration is strongly recommended by contacting Shiprock Regional Business Development Office Specialist Tovina Yazzie (505) at 368-1315 for the **February 25 Shiprock workshop...or the Las Vegas/San Miguel County Chamber of Commerce at (505) 425-8631** or lvexec@qwestoffice.net.

The New Mexico Veterans' Business Outreach Center

The New Mexico Veterans' Business Outreach Center (VBOC) was created by the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services to help veteran-owned businesses. It was the first such state-funded center in the nation created specifically to help veterans.

For more information about the VBOC, contact Rich Coffel at richardl.coffel@state.nm.us or (505) 383-2402

New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services to Take Part in *Rio Rancho Veterans Resource Day*

The New Mexico Department of Veterans Services is one of several agencies to be on site for *Rio Rancho Veterans Resource Day* on March 19 from 9am-2pm at the Sabana Grande Community Center, located at 4110 Sabana Grande Avenue SE in the city of Rio Rancho.

The free event is presented by the Sandoval County Community Health Program, the city of Rio Rancho—**along with the New Mexico Department of Veterans'**

Services, the New Mexico Veterans Business Outreach Center, the and New Mexico Rural Veterans Coordination Program. Veterans, Guard/Reserve and transitioning active-duty military personnel are invited to meet representatives from these and other local, state and federal agencies to find out about VA Pensions, Disability Compensation, the G.I. Bill, VA and other veteran-supportive health care agencies, state property tax exemptions for veterans, local transportation services, women veterans benefits, and many more veterans benefits and services.



For more information, contact the NMDVS Albuquerque NE Heights office at (505) 383-2414 or josephm.dorn@state.nm.us.

2016 Military WinterFest to Offer Discounted Fun-Filled Snow Activities for Veterans & Families



The Angel Fire Ski Resort is proudly presenting The Second Annual Military Winterfest from February 18-22 featuring skiing, **snowboarding, sleigh rides, tubing, snowshoeing and s'mores parties** at reduced rates for pre-registered military veterans, retirees, active-duty service members, and their families.

Organizers have also planned a Twilight Colors Retirement Parade down the mountain, inter-service ski and snowboard races, an **American Flag "Jump-In" by former US Army Golden Knight and**

double amputee Dana Bowman on Saturday, February 20, and a dinner featuring live music for the first 230 who pre-register. Special adaptive ski programs are also scheduled for those with physical disabilities.

To take advantage of exclusive military discounts, participants must pre-register. Online registration is \$20 individuals, \$30 families; onsite registration is \$35 individuals, \$45 families. Pre-registration includes all activities, VIP access to all events; a VIP Gift bag; a collectable Military Challenge Coin, discounted lift tickets, and half-priced equipment rentals and lessons. Advanced online registration is available at www.veteranswellnessandhealing.org/events/

The Angel Fire Resort is offering lodging, lessons and equipment specials for Winterfest attendees at www.angelfireresort.com or call toll-free at 1-(888) 371-7344. Use the Promo Code: VETS. Registration fees are tax-deductible and directly supports the National Veterans Wellness & Healing Center which provides treatment for military individuals and families suffering with Post-Traumatic Stress.

National Veterans Wellness Center in Angel Fire Now Accepting Applications for Wellness Retreats



The National Veterans Wellness and Healing Center in Angel Fire is accepting applications for its Spring week-long retreats for veterans, active duty/Guard/Reserve service members and their significant others who have been diagnosed with PTS (Post Traumatic Stress).

The retreats offer traditional and non-traditional healing methods such as Native American healing ceremonies, equine training, massage, yoga, **aroma therapy, acupuncture, art therapy, Reiki...along with couples and group counseling sessions.** The dates of the retreats are: April May 1-8, May 22-29, June 5-12, and June 22-29.

According to the Healing Center, the natural setting in the beautiful Sangre de Cristo Mountains is the perfect location to bring couples to where nature can assist with the healing process. The number of participant couples is kept small--thus making each and every experience and tool which you are provided much more intimate.

All lodging, meals and activity/meetings are paid for by the center. Participants need only to fully commit to the week-long retreat session for which they have signed up. For more information and to register, go to www.veteranswellnessandhealing.org/retreats or call Participant Coordinators Rick or Cindy Sprott at (575) 224-4848.

Got a Veteran-Related Event Coming Up?? Let us Know—We'll Help Spread the Word

The New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services (NMDVS) is happy to help get the word out through *The Guardian* about upcoming veteran-related events in your community.

Please provide all pertinent information—such as name of event, sponsor/presenter, date, time, venue, admission cost (if any), purpose of event, flyers, news releases, etc.—as well as a phone number or E-mail address of a person to be published as a point-of-contact for further information.

Please E-mail all information to ray.seva@state.nm.us—ensuring that it is sent in a timely manner.

DISCLAIMER:

Publication of an event in *The Guardian* is done solely as a “community service” for New Mexico’s veteran population. Unless stated, the NMDVS does not assume partnerships with organizations—or indicate responsibility of any event sent for publication in *The Guardian*. Responsibility for the purpose or staging of an event lies solely with the source sending event notifications to the NMDVS.

Publication of an event in *The Guardian* does not necessarily reflect an endorsement by the NMDVS or the state of New Mexico. The NMDVS will not publish any event notifications sent without a Point-of-Contact and supporting contact information.

The NMDVS reserves the right to withhold publication of an event.

VA to Propose Expanded Disability Benefits Eligibility for Veterans Exposed to Contaminated Water at Camp Lejeune



**VA Secretary
Robert A. McDonald**

For more news from the VA and for benefits information, visit www.va.gov

The VA has a regional office in Albuquerque. For more Information: www.benefits.va.gov/albuquerque

For information about VA health care, visit the website of the New Mexico VA Health Care System at: www.albuquerque.va.gov

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced will propose expanded disability compensation eligibility for veterans exposed to contaminated drinking water while assigned to Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune.



From 1953 to 1987, water sources at the base were contaminated with industrial solvents that are correlated with certain health conditions. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald decided to propose presumptions of service connection for certain conditions associated with these chemical solvents following discussions between environmental health experts at the Veterans Health Administration and the Department of Health and Human Services Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR).

“The water at Camp Lejeune was a hidden hazard, and it is only years later that we know how dangerous it was,” said Secretary McDonald. “We thank ATSDR for the thorough review that provided much of the evidence we needed to fully compensate Veterans who develop one of the conditions known to be related to exposure to the compounds in the drinking water.”

ATSDR determined that the drinking water at Camp Lejeune was contaminated with perchloroethylene, trichloroethylene, vinyl chloride, benzene and other petroleum contaminants from leaking storage tanks from 1953 to 1987. ATSDR also determined that prolonged exposure to these chemicals increases the risk of certain health conditions.

Based upon the VA’s review of current medical science and ATSDR’s findings, Secretary McDonald intends to propose creation of a presumption of service connection for the following conditions:

- Kidney Cancer
- Liver Cancer
- Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma
- Leukemia
- Multiple Myeloma
- Scleroderma
- Parkinson's Disease
- Aplastic Anemia / Myelodysplastic Syndromes

The Secretary’s proposal would also expand benefits eligibility to Reserve and National Guard personnel who served at Camp Lejeune for any length of time from August 1, 1953, through December 31, 1987. These personnel would be presumed to have been exposed to the contaminated water during their Reserve or National Guard service and, in appropriate circumstances, to have been disabled by such exposure during service, thus allowing them to qualify for VA benefits under the statutory definition of “veteran.”

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This would make them eligible for VA disability compensation and medical care for any of the presumptive conditions, and their surviving dependents would be eligible for dependency and indemnity compensation and burial benefits.

The VA is working on regulations that would establish these presumptions, making it easier for affected Veterans to receive VA disability compensation for these conditions. While the VA cannot grant any benefit claims based on the proposed presumption of service connection for these conditions until it issues its final regulations, it encourages veterans who have a record of service at Camp Lejeune between August 1, 1953, and December 31, 1987, and develop a condition that they believe is related to exposure to the drinking water at the base, to file a disability compensation claim with the VA.

The VA will continue to grant claims for disabilities claimed to be associated with exposure to the contaminants that can be granted under current regulations and review of the evidence in each case. If a claim for service connection for one of the proposed presumptive conditions would be denied under current regulations, the denial will be stayed until the VA issues its final regulations. The VA will announce when the regulations are final and presumptive benefits can begin to be awarded. For more information on applying for these benefits, visit: www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/claims-postservice-exposures-camp_lejeune_water.asp.

Veterans who served at Camp Lejeune for 30 days or more between August 1, 1953, and December 31, 1987, are already eligible to receive VA healthcare for up to 15 health conditions. More information, including a full list of covered conditions, can be found online at: www.publichealth.va.gov/PUBLICHEALTH/exposures/camp-lejeune/index.asp.

Veterans can establish eligibility for healthcare benefits by submitting VA Form 10-10EZ online at www.1010ez.med.va.gov/, downloading it at www.va.gov/vaforms/medical/pdf/1010EZ-fillable.pdf and returning it to any VA Medical Center or Clinic, or by calling 1-877-222-VETS (8387), Monday through Friday, between the hours of 8:00 AM and 8:00 PM (Eastern Time).

The VA is reimbursing certain veterans' family members for eligible out-of-pocket medical expenses related to the 15 covered conditions. More information can be found at www.clfamilymembers.fsc.va.gov



VA Makes Changes to Veterans Choice Program



Veterans Choice Program

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has made changes to make participation in the ***Veterans Choice Program*** easier and more convenient for veterans.

The VA has streamlined eligibility requirements, following feedback from veterans across the country, along with organizations working on their behalf.

More than 400,000 medical appointments have been scheduled since the Veterans Choice Program went into effect on November 5, 2014. Under the old policy, a veteran was eligible for the Veterans Choice Program if he or she met the following criteria:

- Enrolled in VA health care by 8/1/14 or able to enroll as a combat veteran to be eligible for the Veterans Choice Program.
- Experienced unusual or excessive burden eligibility determined by geographical challenges, **environmental factors or a medical condition impacting the veteran's ability to travel.**
- **Determined eligible based on the veteran's current residence being more than 40 miles driving distance from the closest VA medical facility.**

Under the updated eligibility requirements, a veteran is eligible for the Veterans Choice Program if he or she is enrolled in the VA health care system and meets at least one of the following criteria:

- Told by his or her local VA medical facility that they will not be able to schedule an appointment **for care within 30 days of the date the veteran's physician determines he/she needs to be seen or** within 30 days of the date the veteran wishes to be seen if there is no specific date from his or her physician.
- Lives more than 40 miles driving distance from the closest VA medical facility with a full-time primary care physician.
- Needs to travel by air, boat or ferry to the VA medical facility closest to his/her home Faces an unusual or excessive burden in traveling to the closest VA medical facility based on geographic challenges, environmental factors, a medical condition, the nature or simplicity or frequency of the care needed and whether an attendant is needed.

Staff at a local VA medical facility will work with the veteran to determine if the he or she is eligible for any of these reasons; or Lives in a State or Territory without a full-service VA medical facility which includes: Alaska, Hawaii, New Hampshire (Note: this excludes New Hampshire Veterans who live within 20 miles of the White River Junction VAMC) and the United States Territories (excluding Puerto Rico, which has a full service VA medical facility).

Veterans seeking to use the Veterans Choice Program or wanting to know more about it, can call toll-free at 1-(866) 606-8198 to confirm their eligibility.

NMDVS FIELD OFFICES

There are seventeen field offices of the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services offices throughout the state to assist veterans and their eligible dependents with filing for VA and state veterans benefits. Each office is managed by a nationally-certified **Veterans' Service Officer** who is committed to helping fellow veterans with filing for the benefits earned through their service and sacrifice for our country.

Please contact your nearest office to set up an appointment. For additional information, you can also contact the main NMDVS office in Santa Fe toll-free at 1-(866) 433-8387 or by visiting our website at www.dvs.state.nm.us and going to the FIELD OFFICES link.

ALAMOGORDO	ALBUQUERQUE #1	ALBUQUERQUE #2
Tony Woodards 411 10th Street # 107 Alamogordo, NM 88310 (575) 437-4635 anthony.woodards@state.nm.us	Jeff George 500 Gold Ave. SW Albuquerque, NM 87102 (505) 346-4810 jeff.george@state.nm.us	Gordon Schei 5201 Eagle Rock Ave. NE Albuquerque, NM 87113 (505) 383-2404 gordon.schei@state.nm.us
CARLSBAD	CLOVIS	FARMINGTON
Dagmar Youngberg 101 N. Halagueno Carlsbad, NM 88220 (575) 885-4939 dagmar.youngberg@state.nm.us	Matthew Barela 904 W. 6th Street Clovis, NM 88101 (575) 762-6185 matthew.barela@state.nm.us	Beverly Charley 101 West Animas Room #104 Farmington, NM 88401 (505) 327-2861 beverly.charley@state.nm.us
GRANTS	HOBBS	LAS CRUCES #1
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LAS CRUCES #2	LAS VEGAS	LOS LUNAS
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RATON	RIO RANCHO	ROSWELL
Gary Fresquez 200 N. 3rd St. Raton, NM 87740 (575) 445-8282 gary.fresquez@state.nm.us	<i>The NMDVS is relocating its Rio Rancho Office. Please call the Albuquerque offices for assistance.</i>	Richard Moncrief 1600 SE Main St./Suite A Roswell, NM 88203 (575) 624-6086 richard.moncrief@state.nm.us
SANTA FE	SILVER CITY	TAOS
<i>(vacant) The NMDVS Santa Fe Office is temporarily vacant. Please call (505) 827-6300 for assistance.</i>	Bradley Brock 1211 North Hudson Silver City, NM 88061 (575) 538-2377 bradleya.brock@state.nm.us	Michael Pacheco 120 Civic Plaza Taos, NM 87571 (575) 758-9624 michael.pacheco1@state.nm.us