

The Bay State Patriot

A Publication Of

Massachusetts Department Of Veterans' Services

Volume 3, Issue 1



Deval L. Patrick
Governor

Timothy P. Murray
Lieutenant Governor

JudyAnn Bigby, M.D.
Secretary, EOHHS

Coleman Nee
Secretary, DVS



Secretary's Welcome

It is an honor to write my first letter of welcome as the Secretary of Veterans' Services for the Commonwealth. Massachusetts is a national leader in Veterans' services, and I am committed to carrying on this proud tradition. Our legacy in this area is a direct result of the hard work of many thousands of individuals in the Veterans' Service profession and I look forward to working with all of our partners at the federal, state, local, and private levels in order to improve service delivery to veterans and their families.

Recently, Governor Patrick offered his budget recommendations and I am proud to say that to veterans' services and programs were level funded and in some cases saw an increase. It is our responsibility to ensure that we are utilizing these funds effectively and responsibly to best serve Massachusetts' veterans.

Going forward, I am committed to expanding the services and programs offered to Massachusetts veterans and their families. Women are playing an increasing role in the armed forces and our Women Veterans' Network will continue to expand and adapt in accordance with the needs of this growing population. For every man and woman who has served our country, we will work to

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address the issue of homelessness among veterans, providing them with an opportunity for permanent shelter and services that will support them in becoming self-sufficient and healthy. As men and women continue to return from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, we must recognize their unique needs as well as adapt our outreach efforts to this new population of veterans.

Our goals are ambitious but, working together, we will accomplish many things on behalf of those that have served this Nation in uniform and for their families.

Sincerely,

Coleman Nee



Quick Links

www.mass.gov/veterans

www.va.gov

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NEW FACES OF DVS

General Counsel, **Stephen D. Gill** was appointed to the Department of Veterans' Services in September 2010. He is a Lt. Commander with the U.S. Navy Judge Advocate General's (JAG) Corps (Reserve), and an OEF/OIF veteran who served in Afghanistan in 2010.

SAVE Team:

Outreach Coordinator, **Marckendy Barthelemy**, USMC, OIF veteran, start date 11/29/10

Outreach Coordinator, **Katharine McAuley**, USN, OIF veteran, start date 12/6/10

Outreach Support Specialist, **Ronald Saucier**, USAF, Vietnam Era veteran, start date 12/6/10

Outreach Coordinator, **Heather Seymour**, USCG, start date 2/7/11

A BATTLE PLAN TO QUIT SMOKING

**COURAGE. COMMITMENT.
THE WILL TO SURVIVE.**
You have what it takes
to quit smoking.



The Department of Veterans' Services and the Department of Public Health have partnered again to provide the state's second, free statewide smoking cessation program designed to help Massachusetts veterans and their families live healthier and longer lives. The program provides a free two-week supply of nicotine patches and telephone support to help in the battle to quit smoking.

In 2008, DVS and DPH partnered to launch their first smoking cessation program for veterans. Nearly 4,000 veterans and family members called the Massachusetts Smokers' Helpline to obtain free support and nicotine patches over the course of the seven month program.

Smoking remains the number one cause of preventable death and disease in the Commonwealth, and the smoking rate among the Commonwealth's veterans remains higher than the state average. The age-adjusted smoking rate for Massachusetts veterans is 23.5%. Studies show that using medications like the nicotine patch, combined with telephone support, triples a smoker's chances of quitting for good.

Massachusetts veterans and their family members can now call the Massachusetts Smokers Helpline at 1-800-QUIT NOW (1-800-784-8669) or go to www.makesmokinghistory.org/veterans to take advantage of this program.

DVS/MVSOA Training for 2011

The annual training for VSOs was once again combined with the Massachusetts Veterans Services Officer Association (MVSOA) Mid-Winter Conference. This has been an ongoing collaboration between DVS and the MVSOA for the last four years and is exceptionally well attended.

The training took place over a four day period starting on Monday, February 28, 2011 and wrapping up on Thursday, March 3, 2011. DVS provided M.G.L. C. 115 specific training with additional training on the Web-VSMIS program. The VA provided training for federal benefits. During this time, numerous external organizations spoke on their programs.

Although this training session is targeted to the VSO audience, any town employee can attend if they have interactions with Veterans or dependants. This year marked the first time that the new electronic monthly certification process is in place. Treasurers and Accountants were invited to learn the finer points of the C. 115 reimbursement process.

Finally, DVS hosted a banquet for DVS employees and VSOs. The Ganno / Brown Award for Excellence was presented to Jay Hill, VSO for the Town of Falmouth. Jay is retired from the Air Force and resides in Falmouth with his wife and two daughters. Jay took over a community that was non-compliant in numerous areas and losing money in missed reimbursement. Within weeks, Jay was able to turn the reimbursement process around and make the Town of Falmouth compliant in all areas. Since Jay took over the office in May 2003, he has had a perfect reimbursement record. The Veterans Services Office Administrator award went to Marie O'Rourke from Billerica. Marie is an outstanding administrator who has worked with the Veterans' community for over thirty years. In addition to taking care of the veterans in Billerica, she is the past president of the Northeast Veterans' Service Officers Association, the co-director of the Billerica food bank, Chairman of the Board of Health, local fuel assistance co-coordinator.

As always, it was great to see all the VSOs and Administrators at this training.

6TH ANNUAL WOMEN ARE VETERANS' TOO! EVENT

The Women Veterans' Network hosted the sixth annual *Women are Veterans Too!* event in Memorial Hall in the State House on November 4, 2010. For the second year, Governor Patrick proclaimed the week of November 1 through November 7 to be Women Veterans' Week. The Honor Guard from the United States Naval Support Operations Center, based in Quincy, posted the colors. Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Sandra Whitley, Air Force veteran, led the invocation. Among the speakers were United States Senator Scott Brown; State Senator Kenneth Donnelly, Co-chair of the Joint Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs; Health and Human Services Secretary Dr. Judy Ann Bigby; then-Secretary of Veterans' Services Tom Kelley, and Mayor David Maher of Cambridge. Liz Thompson, a USMC Veteran, shared her story of service and transitioning from wartime service to civilian life and the practices and relationships that have helped her along the way.

This year, we honored Captain Mary Jo Majors, United States Naval Reserve Nurse Corps and a resident of Cambridge as the 2010 Outstanding Woman Veteran of the Year. Captain Majors has cared for wounded warriors from Viet Nam and Desert Storm. Having dedicated over 40 years of service to the military, Captain Majors still serves in the Naval Reserve and mentors many young men and women considering the military as a career. This event also marked the first event for our



Pictured from the left: Liz Thompson, USMC Iraqi Freedom Veteran and Keynote Speaker; Viviana Cordoba, Women Veterans' Network; Marybeth O'Sullivan, Veterans' Upward Bound; CAPT Mary Jo Majors, Woman Veteran of the Year; Cheryl Poppe, Department of Veterans' Services; Carolyn Mason Wholley, VA Boston Women Veterans' Program Mgr; Noreen Begley, VA Women's Veteran Coordinator; Kim Adams, Women Veterans Program Mgr VA Northampton

new Women Veterans' Coordinator, Viviana Cordoba. (See "New Faces"). It was a wonderful day celebrating women Veterans and their service to the Nation and Commonwealth.

DEADLINE FOR RETROACTIVE STOP LOSS SPECIAL PAY EXTENDED

DoD News Release

The deadline for eligible service members, veterans and their beneficiaries to apply for Retroactive Stop Loss Special Pay (RSLSP) has been extended to April 8, 2011, allowing personnel more time to apply for the benefits they've earned under the program guidelines.

The deadline extension is included in the continuing resolution signed by President Obama Friday, providing funding for federal government operations through April 8, 2011.

Retroactive Stop Loss Special Pay was established to compensate for the hardships military members encountered when their service was involuntarily extended under Stop Loss Authority between Sept. 11, 2001, and Sept. 30, 2009. Eligible members or their beneficiaries may submit a claim to their respective military service in order to receive the benefit of \$500 for each full or partial month served in a Stop Loss status.

When RSLSP began on Oct. 21, 2009, the services estimated 145,000 service members, veterans and beneficiaries were eligible for this benefit. Because the majority of those eligible had separated from the military, the services have engaged in extensive and persistent outreach efforts to reach them and remind them to apply. Outreach efforts including direct mail, engaging military and veteran service organizations, social networks and media outlets, will continue through April 8, 2011.

To apply for more information, or to gather more information on RSLSP, including submission requirements and service-specific links, go to <http://www.defense.gov/stoploss>.

VETERANS ON INAUGURATION DAY

On January 6, 2011, Governor Patrick and Lt. Governor Murray took the oath of office to begin their second term. Veterans and military families played an active role in the Governor's inaugural celebrations. As part of Project 351, the Governor's day of enrichment, action and community service, donations were raised for the National Guard's Military and Family Support Center in Wellesley. The Center supports our brave men and women with legal support, financial information, family programs, and transition assistance. On Inauguration Day, Governor Patrick invited Veterans from across the state to attend and lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

Massachusetts veterans Rachel Caesar, U.S. Army of Dorchester; Christopher Brown, U.S. Air Force of Westminister; Willie Van Ledbetter, U.S. Army of Pittsfield; and Maria Oltjenbruns, U.S. Army of Northampton were welcomed by Senate President Therese Murray to begin the inaugural ceremony. These brave men and women are a testament to Massachusetts's commitment to ensuring that the men and women who have served our country receive the care and resources they have earned upon returning home. At one time, each of these men and women were homeless, but their hard work and perseverance - along with the support of state and federal government, non-profit organizations, and community -- led them to permanent housing and self-sufficiency.

Massachusetts continues to be a national leader in Veterans' services, based on the quality programs

and services in place to provide support and assistance to our Veterans and their families.

GOVERNOR PATRICK PAYS RESPECT AT CAMBRIDGE AMERICAN CEMETERY AND MEMORIAL SITE IN UK

On Tuesday, March 15, 2011, Governor Deval Patrick visited the Cambridge American Cemetery and Memorial in Madingley, UK to pay respects to fallen U.S. military members from World War II.

During his visit, Governor Patrick laid a wreath in honor of Massachusetts-born fallen service members, and presented the cemetery with a Massachusetts flag previously flown over the State House in honor of the state's service members who are buried, or listed as missing.

Governor Patrick also placed flowers on the grave of Technical Sergeant Chester W Yurick, of Needham, MA. Yurick served as radio operator on a B-24 Liberator from the 44th Bomb Group based at Shipdham in Norfolk, England. He and his crew died following a crash landing after their aircraft was damaged by German defenses.

Today the cemetery's flags were flown at half-staff in honor of recently-deceased Naval officer John W. Finn, who received the Medal of Honor for heroism at Pearl Harbor.

The Cambridge American Cemetery and Memorial site was donated by the University of Cambridge and occupies 30.5 acres in total. The cemetery contains the remains of 3,812 American military dead, including 360 from Massachusetts, with another 5,127 names recorded on the Tablets of the Missing. Many of the soldiers buried at the cemetery died in the Battle of the Atlantic in World War II, or in the strategic air bombardment of northwest Europe.

The visit was made during the Massachusetts Innovation Economy Partnership Mission 2011, which is focusing on business expansion, job growth and collaboration between Massachusetts, the UK and Israel. The Massachusetts delegation arrived in the UK on March 12 and will depart on March 17 to return to Boston.



Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick pays respects at Cambridge American Cemetery in Madingley, UK. (Photo credit: Jack Murray)

HELMETS TO HARD HATS

In collaboration with Building Trades, Associations and other unions, DVS has begun rejuvenating the *Helmet to Hard Hats* (H2H) program. Making a successful transition from the military into the civilian workforce can be difficult. Transitioning military Veterans face the same challenges as any other job hunter - getting their résumé to the right people, learning how to market themselves, tracking down promising leads, and following-up with employers, headhunters, job placement agencies. Veterans have the added stress translating the skills they learned in the military into language that civilian employers can understand. The process can feel overwhelming, especially if it seems like meaningful help is unavailable. H2H was formed to help our National Guard, Reserve, retired and transitioning active-duty military members connect to quality career and training opportunities in one of America's most challenging and rewarding industries - the construction industry. For more information, please contact H2H: www.helmetstohardhats.org or call Richie Eckler (781) 420 6194.

SECRETARY NEE SWEARING IN



On Monday, January 24, 2011, newly appointed Secretary of Veterans' Services Coleman Nee was joined by family as he was sworn in to office by Governor Patrick. A veteran of the United States Marine Corps and Operation Desert Storm, Secretary Nee had previously held the role of Undersecretary of Veterans' Services since 2008. In his new role as Secretary, Nee has pledged to focus on strengthening operations and service delivery to Veterans and their families.

STUDY TIES PROBLEMS TO POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS

By Lisa Daniel
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Jan. 6, 2011 - Service members who suffer mild traumatic brain injuries in combat and then struggle with depression, irritability, alcohol abuse and similar problems after they return home most likely are experiencing post-traumatic stress, rather than brain injury symptoms, according to a new study. The study, sponsored by the Defense and Veterans Affairs departments and published in this month's Archives of General Psychiatry, a Journal of the American Medical Association publication, tracked Minnesota National Guard soldiers during the last month of their 16-month deployment to Iraq, then again a year after they returned home.

The findings, based on the self-reporting of 953 soldiers with follow-ups from the clinicians, showed "very little evidence for a long-term negative impact" from concussions or mild TBI on "psycho-social outcomes" -- anxiety, depression, drug and alcohol abuse and the like -- after accounting for post-traumatic stress, said Melissa A. Polusny, a clinical psychologist at the Minneapolis Veterans Affairs Health Care System and a professor at University of Minnesota Medical School.

Polusny wrote the study along with five other clinical psychologists, and in collaboration with Army Col. (Dr.) Michael Rath, a surgeon with the 34th Infantry Division brigade that participated in the study.

"After we statistically controlled for PTSD symptoms, there were virtually no long-term symptoms from concussive and mild TBI," she said.

Polusny emphasized that the study only investigated mild TBI, which may cause a person to be momentarily dazed or confused or lose consciousness for fewer than 20 minutes, but causes no actual injury to the brain or skull. Also, the study did not consider repeated head trauma -- the subject of other studies that have suggested long-term effects -- in the soldiers, 95 percent of whom were on their first deployment to Iraq in 2005, she said.

The study's focus on mild TBI is significant for today's warfighters, Polusny said, because "the vast majority of reports of TBI are mild."

The study's findings, she added, are "very interesting and not exactly what we expected." The findings show that service members are much more likely to report concussions and mild traumatic brain injuries after they return home than they are in the combat theater. Of those

surveyed, only 9 percent reported concussions or TBI in theater, but 22 percent reported incidents after redeployment.

Similarly, 9 percent reported symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder in theater, compared to 14 percent at home; and 9 percent reported symptoms of depression, compared to 18 percent at home.

Many of the soldiers who answered that they did not have mild TBI or post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms actually did, the VA's publication brief of the study says. Of those, 64 percent reported having problems with distractibility and irritability, 60 percent reported memory problems, 57 percent reported ringing in the ears, and 23 percent had balance problems. Another notable finding, Polusny said, is that after their return home, more than 40 percent of the Iraq war veterans reported some levels of alcohol abuse. "There's been a lot of attention paid to PTSD and mild TBI and even suicide risk, but the prevalence of problem drinking appears to be much higher among returning service members than any of these other problems," she said.

Researchers were surprised at the wide difference in reporting from the war theater to home, Polusny said. They believe the disparity may be due to service members' reluctance to report problems while deployed, or that they have a different impression of events when they return home, she said. The differences may reflect a need for better post-deployment questioning of veterans, she added.

"One of the really important implications of the findings is that we need to be carefully screening for PTSD, and make sure veterans receive treatment," Polusny said. Polusny added that the findings caused concern that combat veterans may misattribute the reason for their problems, which could hamper treatment or cause a service member to not seek treatment. "If a veteran is having irritability and memory problems, and assumes he had a concussion when maybe he is suffering from PTSD symptoms, we need to make sure we are treating veterans for the right problems," she said.

The study did not investigate the cause of the PTSD or whether the TBI triggered it. "The events that surround a concussion or mild TBI in theater -- being exposed to a blast or being in a firefight -- those kinds of events already place someone at risk of PTSD," Polusny said. "Is that due to injury to the brain, or the situation they are in? We can't piece that apart yet."

NEWS FROM THE VA

HAVE YOU HEARD?

VA Press Release

On March 1, 2013, VA will stop issuing paper checks to comply with Department of Treasury policy. Veterans and other beneficiaries who do not have electronic payments for their federal benefits by that time will receive their funds via a pre-paid debit card. Called the Direct Express card, it is issued by Commercial Bank as the financial agent of the U.S. Treasury. As a prelude to going to totally paperless payments, those receiving VA compensation or pension benefits for the first time after May 1, 2011 will automatically receive the benefits electronically. Anyone already receiving federal benefit payments electronically will be unaffected by the changes. To learn more

about the federal government's switch to direct deposit - or to change VA benefits to direct deposit -- visit www.GoDirect.org. Information about the federal government's "Go Direct" campaign is also available at 1-800-333-1795. Along with payments for VA benefit, the change will also affect recipients of payments from Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, Railroad Retirement Board, and Office of Personnel Management.

UPDATE ON COST-OF-LIVING ADJUSTMENT FOR VETERANS COMPENSATION AND PENSION BENEFITS IN 2011

COLA Tied to Social Security and Consumer Price Index

VA news release

WASHINGTON - The Social Security Administration has announced that no cost-of-living adjustments will be made to Social Security benefits in 2011 because the consumer price index has not risen since 2008 when the last Social Security increase occurred.

Like recipients of Social Security and other federal benefits, Veterans, their families and survivors will also not see a cost-of-living adjustment in 2011 to their compensation and pension benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Under federal law, the cost-of-living adjustments to VA's compensation and pension rates are the same percentage as for Social Security benefits.

VA provides compensation and pension benefits to about four million Veterans and beneficiaries. For more information about VA benefits, go to www.va.gov or call 1-800-827-1000.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, March 26

9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

- Massachusetts National Guard Presents: 106th Annual Mass National Guard Assn. at the Sheraton Framingham Hotel. Please email webmaster@ngama.org for more information.

Friday, April 1

8:00 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

- The Boston Bar Association Presents: Representing Veterans and Military in Criminal Proceedings - Veterans and Military Symposium at the Boston Bar Association Office. Please contact (617) 778 2020 or cl@bostonbar.org for more information.

April 7

4:15 p.m. - 5:45 p.m.

- Community Rowing Presents: Opening Day for U.S. Military Veterans Rowing at the Harry Parker Boathouse in Brighton. For more information please contact (617) 779 8264 or visit

www.communityrowing.org

Tuesday, April 12

1:00 pm-4:00 pm

- Father Bill's and MainSpring Hosts A Veterans' Services Event at The FBMS Residences in Brockton. For more information please contact Paul Key (508) 894 8520 x 201 or pkey@helpfbms.org

Wednesday, April 13

6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

- Methuen Veterans' Service Officer Tom Hargreaves Hosts the 12th Annual Veterans' Information Night at the Methuen Senior Center. For more information please contact (978) 983-8585

The Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) advocates on behalf of the nearly half-million veterans in Massachusetts, their families, and survivors. DVS works to secure federal compensation and other benefits for which veterans may be eligible. The Department also administers needs-based benefits program through Veterans' Service Officers throughout Massachusetts and provides state funding to organizations offering homeless shelter, transitional housing and outreach services to veterans.

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