



Veterans' Update

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

October, 2004

Greetings,

The Veterans' Update is a quarterly newsletter created to keep you abreast of veterans' issues and legislation in Washington and in Florida's Fifth Congressional District. House franking regulations forbid mass mailings during the ninety day period preceding an election, and therefore this edition of the newsletter will only be available electronically until after the election.

This edition of the Veterans' Update will highlight the last Veterans' Advisory Board meeting, the progress made on local veterans' healthcare clinics, a rumor circulated on the internet concerning your military records, and an update on the Korean Defense Service Medal. Also, shortly before Congress adjourned earlier this month, Congress passed major improvements to the Survivors' Benefit Program that so many of my constituents have wanted.

I apologize to all those who enjoy receiving the newsletter that do not have access to e-mail. I assure you that paper distribution will resume after the November election as House regulations allow.

THIRD MEETING OF VETERANS' ADVISORY BOARD A SUCCESS

Hearing back from the veterans I represent is one of the most rewarding and useful aspects of my job – especially since I am a member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee. Accordingly, I created a Veterans Advisory Board to better represent the concerns and priorities of the veterans' community. The board and I convene twice a year and held our last meeting on August 23rd in Lecanto.

Members shared stories with me on the progress made in lowering wait times at local clinics, and suggested areas that still need improvement. In addition, I heard a great deal of support for the young men and women currently serving overseas, and concern for them and their families as they return home. I am always moved by the support I hear for our young troops – especially when it comes from those that have served before them. This new generation of American heroes also needs an advocate in Washington for their specific needs and I am here to voice there concerns.

If you are interested in joining the advisory board, please call my district office at 866-G-WAITE-5.

VILLAGES VA CLINIC IN SUMTER COUNTY TO BE OPERATIONAL IN THREE MONTHS

*75,000 square foot facility in Marion County to be ready in January, 2007 -
earlier than once expected*

I received notification this summer that the veterans' healthcare clinic in Sumter County will be available and operational earlier than previously expected. The Villages has agreed to donate an existing facility for the clinic, eliminating the time it would have taken to construct a new one.

This is fantastic news for thousands of area veterans. Because of the generous offer made by the Villages in 2003, our nation's heroes residing in Central Florida will now receive better medical attention – and receive it much sooner.

The existing building that will house the new clinic is at the corner of Highway 466 and Buena Vista Boulevard. I'm thrilled to report that the clinic will be ready by January of 2005.

Furthermore, the VA multi-care clinic in Marion County that was included in the CARES (Capital Assessment Realignment for Enhanced Services) report is now scheduled to be completed in 2007 – also earlier than previous projections. The Villages approached the VA with their offer to donate the land for this 75,000 square foot facility, and negotiations are underway to select a site for that multi-care clinic. The land donation by The Villages will save the VA money, and could accelerate its opening by as much as nine months.

LEASE SIGNED FOR VETERANS CLINIC IN CITRUS COUNTY

After expediting the approval process, the lease for the Brown School clinic was authorized by the VA this past month. Citrus County officials are currently finalizing the transaction, as unexpected damage from the hurricanes is being evaluated and repaired.

SBP INEQUITY WILL END

Recently, Congress passed the 2005 Defense Authorization Act, which included reforms to the Survivor's Benefits Program (SBP) by repealing the so-called "Widow's Tax." Starting next year, widows of military retirees will receive a greater percentage of the benefits owed to them. The unfair social security offset will be completely eliminated by 2008. This repeal is phased in over the next four years, gradually increasing the widow's benefit to 55% of their spouse's former income.

The Republicans in Congress were able to find an avenue to end this inequity by including it in the Defense Authorization Act, and I'm proud to have worked with Rep. Jeff Miller (FL-1) on making sure we took care of this major veterans issue before Congress adjourned.

YOUR RECORDS WILL NOT BE DESTROYED

I recently became aware of a rumor that has been circulated to veterans' groups over the Internet concerning military records. The e-mail states that the National Archives will be scanning its military records and that the paper files will be destroyed.

I contacted The National Archives and Records Administration to determine the validity of the e-mails and to express my concern. It turns out that this rumor is completely false. The National Personnel Records Center does not intend to destroy its paper record holdings. The purpose of any scanning that may be done is to reduce the need for handling fragile records, but paper copies will not be destroyed.

UPDATE ON THE KOREAN DEFENSE SERVICE MEDAL

In the last issue of the Veterans' Update I informed you about the Korean Defense Service Medal (KDSM), a new award to give special recognition for the sacrifices and contributions of those who have served or are serving in the Republic of Korea.

I have received 167 applications for the medal, and the Department of Defense has indicated that the medals will be available for distribution in the coming months. In order to send a request for the KDSM, veterans will need to provide a copy of their DD-214 or other records showing their Korean military service time. Veterans must have served in Korea for 30 consecutive days or 60 non-consecutive after July 28, 1954 to qualify for the KDSM. All interested, eligible veterans should contact my office for assistance in being honored with this award for their service by calling toll free at 1-866-G-WAITE-5.

###



**Congresswoman Ginny Brown-Waite, 20 North Main St.
Brooksville, FL 34601, toll free 1-866-GWAITE-5
www.house.gov/brown-waite**