

Did You Know?

Office: 312-980-4266 Email: Raymond.Toczek@va.gov

That each year our Legion Service Officers from all of our State Departments meet in Indianapolis, Indiana for training? For three days they are furnished with a wealth of information from the law firm of Bergmann & Moore and the Department of Veterans Affairs. This training is sponsored by the American Legion VA&R Washington office. Here are some of the highlights:

® Veterans Administration debt letters should not be ignored. If a veteran doesn't pay the debt, request a waiver or agree to a payment plan that debt will be turned over to a collection agency. The fees associated with that are 28%! And it will cause a drop in your credit score of up to 150 points. DON'T IGNORE THOSE LETTERS, ACT IMMEDIATELY.

® Regarding debts, the Veterans Administration can also take up to 15% of a veteran's Social Security check.

® The VA is now making 1.4 million claim decisions a year and the average processing time is 99 days.

® Pain alone, if there is no known cause of it, can be considered a disability if it causes some functional impairment and there was some incident in service.

® If a vet uses the CHOICE program those records are NOT automatically sent to their VA hospital or clinic. So if a vet files a request for an increase they should alert the VA that they were treated under CHOICE.

® There are 460,000 appeals currently pending and if a vet requests a personal or video hearing that adds 2 years to the process. The new RAMP program should help reduce this immensely but as of now some appeals are taking 7 years!

® If a vet filed a claim in the 70's and the VA got it but never acted on it the vet could get back pay all the way to the original date they filed.

® Of the 3.5 million exams ordered for VA claims, 1.7 million were contracted out to private sources.

® As of February of 2019 there will be no more travel board appeal hearings, only videos.

® Back conditions can lead to bowel and bladder problems which can be considered secondary service-connection.

® Soldiers who were involved in production of uranium at Paducah, KY. Oak Ridge TN and Portsmouth OH might now get service-connected compensation for some cancers.

® Of those veterans who file claims for a mental condition 60% have PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and 12% have major depression.

® If a vet uses alcohol to numb the effects of their PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) they might now be able to get 2nd service-connection for the alcohol abuse.

® The top three conditions that are granted for service-connection are Bilateral Hearing Loss, Tinnitus and a mental condition.

® The VA's Debt Management Center collected 1.6 Billion dollars in overpayments last year. Their telephone system is now open M-F from 6:30 am to 6:00 pm CST.

That's all for now, hope to be able to report next month on our state convention resolutions that were sent to the national convention.

Until next month stay safe, sound and happy.