

Navigating the web to find the latest information relevant to student veterans can be a daunting task. The staff at the CSUSB Veterans Success Center decided to make things easier by combing the web for you and creating a blog that will not only keep you apprised about veterans' issues on a global scale, but provide you the necessary information to be successful and have fun here on campus. The blog, which will be posted monthly, consists of four parts:

- ◆ "Outside the Wire," written by Marci Daniels, VSC Director and U.S. Army Veteran, deals with federal, state, and local veterans issues;
- ◆ "Guide to the University," written by Kenny Jacobs, USMC Reservist and Student Assistant, provides insight on the new student veteran experience and explains CSUSB policies, procedures and services.
- ◆ "Scuttlebutt," written by Zayre Ruiz, Student Assistant, is dedicated to improving your social life on and off campus.
- ◆ "Questions and Answers," written by Jaime Espinoza, ASA II and CSUSB alumni, provides answers to questions you have about CSUSB.

#### Outside the Wire by Marci Daniels

I was searching the internet the other day in an attempt to write something profound about why it's important to stay current with the federal, state, and local news. Bam! There before my eyes was the answer in of all places Wiki answers.

"There are four cornerstones in a democracy:

1. The right to speak and associate freely;
2. The right to access information without unnecessary government control and censorship, including freedom of the press, and now freedom of the Internet;
3. Honest, stable, and effective legislative, administrative, judicial, and security infrastructures; and
4. The right to vote freely

In a democracy, we have the privilege to enjoy these cornerstones. But democracy is not free - it requires informed citizens." Armed with this noble purpose, I will make a bold attempt to keep you informed about veterans' issues each month. This month, I am focusing on proposed changes to filing disability claims with the VA and GI Bill updates.

#### Proposed VA Rule Change to File a Disability Claim

The Department of Veteran Affairs provides VA disability benefits for those with disabilities as a result of their military service. The VA website explains that to qualify for veteran compensation you must have (1) a disability at the present time that has been diagnosed medically; (2) a disease, injury or event in the service; and (3) your current medical condition is related to the in-service medical condition.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has proposed a rule change instituting a standard form that must be completed by veterans filing for disability compensation or to appeal a decision. Currently, a written note can initiate a claim or an appeal. The VA argues that the new forms will help them decrease the list of 400,000 veterans waiting more than 125 days for a disability decision. They claim that employees spend a great deal of time just trying to figure out what veterans are claiming, which would be minimized by implementing a standardized form.

Major veterans groups such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars call the change “Draconian” and “heavy-handed.” The law firm of Bergmann & Moore, which specializes in pursuing disability claims declared, “The most serious, egregious attack on a veteran-friendly disability claim system in VA history.”

One of the major sticking points for veterans is that under the current system once the VA makes its decision, benefits generally accrue back to when the claim was first initiated.

### **GI Bill Updates for the New Fiscal Year**

Active duty service members who made the \$1,200 investment into the MGIB at enlistment are entitled to a refund. When all 36 months of GI Bill benefits have been exhausted, the \$1,200 (or corresponding percentage of the 36 months used under the Post 9/11 options) is refunded as an addition to the 36<sup>th</sup> and final Monthly Housing Allowance stipend check. A Family dependent using the transferred Post-9/11 during that 36<sup>th</sup> month will also receive the refund.

The Post 9/11 GI benefit covers all tuition up to the highest in-state rate, and for private schools, the yearly cap for tuition and fees was increased to \$19,198.31 (up from \$18,077.50).

The Monthly Housing Allowance (MHA) stipend check remains at the BAH rate of E-5 with dependents. The MHA was increased slightly for all online coursework to \$714.50.

Remember, service members can take back transferred benefits from family dependents at any time. Moreover, GI Bill benefits are not considered marital property.

Service members using Post-9/11 benefits while active duty, tuition is paid up to the highest in-state rates or the annual cap and the book stipend is paid; however, the MHA will not be paid as the member receives BAH.