

Newsbytes

November 16, 2018

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Time is Running Out to Pass Agent Orange Reform Bill

Congress is in session this week and the week of November 27. Congress will also be in session the first full week of December and the week of December 10. Time is running out for the Senate to vote on the "Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act" (H.R.299). The bill is now in the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee awaiting a vote. The House sponsor Rep. David Valadao (Calif.) sent a letter to Senate Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Senator Johnny Isakson, co-signed by more than 100 Representatives, urging the Chairman to move the bill before the end of the 115th Congress.

The original proposal clarifies that service members serving off the coast of the Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam conflict have a presumption for filing disability claims with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for ailments associated with exposure to the Agent Orange herbicide.

The bill has been amended to extend the presumption of herbicide exposure for veterans who served on or near the Korean DMZ between September 1, 1967 and August 31, 1971. As amended, the legislation will now also extend health care, vocational training & rehabilitation and monetary allowance to a child who was born with spina bifida if at least one of the child's parents served in Thailand between January 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975 and the VA determines that at least one of the parents had been exposed to a herbicide agent during that period. The bill also includes changes to the VA's home loan program.

FRA believes Congress should recognize these veterans were exposed to Agent Orange herbicide and authorize presumptive status for disability claims. Now is the time to [contact your Senators](#) to ask them to support this bill, and push for a Senate committee vote.

HVAC Subcommittee Reviews VA EHR Implementation

The House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Technology Modernization held an oversight hearing on the Electronic Health Record Modernization (EHRM) program's accomplishments throughout its first 180 days. They also reviewed the activities planned for the upcoming year. The subcommittee experienced "sticker shock" regarding estimated cost overruns. Mr. John Windom, Executive Director, Office of Electronic Health Record Modernization at the Department of Veterans Affairs assured the subcommittee that the VA would continue to look

for efficiencies and savings as EHRM is implemented. Mr. Windom stated that the VA was meeting its implementation goals and is working with the Department of Defense (DoD) with the implementation of their new HER. It will be interoperable with the VA program. It is still early in the process, but he assured the committee that best practices were going to be used at every available step in the process. The VA was using the analysis report from the Defense Health Agency's Military Health System (Genesis System) as a baseline for the EHRM.

TRICARE Open Season and FEDVIP Sign Up is Now Available

TRICARE Open Season has begun and the Federal Employee Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP) enrollment is also now available online. If a beneficiary is using a TRICARE health plan and they do not want to make any changes, they do not have to do anything during TRICARE Open Season. If a beneficiary wants to make changes (such as switching from individual to family plan, switch from Select to Prime or vice versa) to their health plan, they must do it during TRICARE Open Season (November 12, 2018-December 10, 2018) or because of a Qualifying Life Event. For more information on TRICARE open season go [online](#).

Also starting this week is open enrollment in the FEDVIP through the BENEFEDS enrollment [portal](#). The FEDVIP open enrollment ends on December 12, 2018. On December 31, 2018, the Defense Health Agency's (DHA) TRICARE Retiree Dental Program (TRDP) will expire. The FY2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) allows military retirees and their families, who were eligible for expiring TRDP, the opportunity to enroll in FEDVIP. The first opportunity to enroll in FEDVIP is in conjunction with the next Federal Benefits Open Season, which runs from November 12 through December 10, 2018, with coverage effective January 1, 2019. If a beneficiary is currently enrolled in a TRDP plan, they will **not** be automatically enrolled in a FEDVIP plan for 2019 and you must enroll during the open season. If you know a retiree that does not have access to a computer, they can call 1-877-888-FEDS (1-877-888-3337), TTY number 1-877-889-5680 to enroll on FEDVIP.

Happy Thanksgiving!

Please note the FRA NHQ will be closed Thursday, November 22 and Friday November 23 and will re-open Monday November 26. Congress will not be in session next week. The next issue of NewsBytes will be issued Friday, November 30. The entire National Headquarters staff wishes everyone—and especially service members serving duty assignments throughout the world—a safe and happy Thanksgiving.