September 18, 2017

VETERANS
MONTHLY INFORMATION PACKAGE

FLAGLER COUNTY

DAVID LYDON
County Veterans Service Officer

ERIC FLORES FEBLES
VSO/Assistant

PHONE: (386) 313-4014; FAX: (386) 313-4114;
Email: DLydon@flaglercounty.org

Feel free to make copies and distribute throughout your organization.
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 7, 2017

VA Unveils Claims Submission Option That Promises to Complete Claims within 30 Days

WASHINGTON — Today, as part of the Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) continued efforts to improve timeliness of services for Veterans and their families, VA unveiled the Decision Ready Claims (DRC) initiative, a disability claims submission option with accredited Veterans Service Organizations (VSO) that promises to deliver faster claims decisions to Veterans and their families.

“The DRC initiative is a collaborative effort between VA and VSOs to help Veterans receive faster decisions on disability claims,” said VA Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin. “VA works closely with participating VSOs to make sure they are properly trained in this new process and given the tools they need to participate successfully in the program on behalf of the Veterans they serve.”

Veterans who choose to submit their claim under DRC can expect to receive a decision within 30 days from the time VA receives the claim. VSOs will ensure all supporting evidence — such as medical exams, military service records, etc. — is included with the claim submission. This advance preparation by the VSOs allows claims to be assigned immediately to claims processors for a quick decision.

DRC was first implemented May 1, 2017, at the St. Paul (Minn.) Regional Office, and is now available at all VA regional offices. While DRC is currently limited to claims for increased compensation (commonly known as claims for increase), and requires Veterans to work with VSOs, VA’s goal is to expand the types of claims accepted under the initiative and allow Veterans other ways to submit their claim under DRC.

DRC is another key step in aggressively modernizing VA’s benefits delivery to Veterans in a fully digital operating environment. With electronic claims processing as a foundation, VA’s innovation will improve service to Veterans, their families, and survivors.

###
VA Awards Grants to Help Homeless and At-risk Veterans and Families

WASHINGTON – Today, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it has awarded $343 million in grants to 288 nonprofit organizations to help low-income Veterans and their families.

The grants were awarded under VA’s Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program.

“With these important grants, we are able to leverage the expertise of local experts to help our most economically vulnerable Veterans avoid or exit homelessness,” said VA Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin. “This is another VA program that moves at-risk Veterans toward housing and independence.”

SSVF funding, which supports outreach, case management and other flexible assistance to rapidly re-house Veterans who become homeless or to prevent Veterans from becoming homeless, was awarded to organizations in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

SSVF served more than 148,800 participants, including approximately 95,300 Veterans and 31,950 children in fiscal year 2016. As a result of these and other efforts, Veteran homelessness is down significantly since 2010.

In addition, approximately 360,000 Veterans and their family members have been permanently housed, rapidly re-housed or prevented from falling into homelessness as a result of VA’s homelessness programs and targeted housing vouchers through the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Today’s recipients competed successfully for grants under a Dec. 7, 2016, Notice of Fund Availability. The funding will support SSVF services in fiscal 2018.

Information about the SSVF program, including the complete list of grantees, may be found at https://www.va.gov/homeless/SSVF/.

###
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
September 14, 2017

VA to make beds available where possible to non-Veteran nursing home residents affected by Hurricane Irma

WASHINGTON — Today, U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. David J. Shulkin announced that VA is making beds available where possible to non-Veteran nursing home residents affected by Hurricane Irma.

Secretary Shulkin has been working with Florida Gov. Rick Scott and Sen. Bill Nelson and their staffs on this issue beginning yesterday evening.

“We thank Governor Scott and Senator Nelson for involving VA, and are grateful we can help our fellow citizens where we can in this time of need,” Secretary Shulkin said. “All Americans are pulling together to help one another, and we must make a special effort for those most vulnerable to the conditions brought on by the storm.”

VA has the ability to make its facilities available to non-Veterans as part of its fourth mission to support national, state and local emergency management, public health, safety and homeland security efforts, and also through a mission assignment under the Stafford Act.

Secretary Shulkin agreed, where practical, to make beds that are not being used by Veterans available to non-Veteran nursing home residents as needed, while ensuring VA continues its primary mission of providing health care to Veterans.

The VA is also working closely with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Federal Emergency Management Agency and state and local partners on the overall response to Irma, in addition to this specific issue.

“We will continue to look for ways to relieve the hardship this powerful storm has caused,” Secretary Shulkin said. “Much of the heavy lifting to recover from the hurricane is still to come, and our leaders and staff are determined to find as many ways as we can for VA to help in coordination with federal, state and local agencies in the response.”

More information on the VA’s response to Hurricanes Irma and Harvey can be found at https://www.va.gov.

###
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 11, 2017

VA staffing new White House VA Hotline Principally with Veterans

Today the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced that the two-month pilot phase of the new White House VA Hotline that began in June has demonstrated that Veterans calling the hotline respond best when their calls are answered by fellow Veterans and others with first-hand experience on their issues.

As a result, VA announced that it will target highly qualified Veterans to staff the hotline going forward, instead of contracting the service to a third-party vendor, and is hiring additional VA personnel to complete the planned move to a 24-hour operation.

“The message we’ve heard loud and clear is Veterans want to talk to other Veterans to help them solve problems and get VA services,” said VA Secretary David J. Shulkin. “We’re taking steps to answer that call.”

This decision will delay the full-time stand-up of the 24-hour service by two months, to no later than October 15, in order to ensure the hiring and training processes are complete.

Until that time, the hotline’s current pilot program service is available to receive calls from Veterans from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday.
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
September 1, 2017

September Marks Suicide Prevention Month

WASHINGTON – The message from the Department of Veterans Affairs to the friends and families of Veterans during Suicide Prevention Month is simple: Be There.

“We know that in 2014, an average of 20 Veterans a day died in this country from suicide, which is 20 too many,” said VA Secretary David J. Shulkin. “This is a national public health crisis requiring a national public health approach. When it comes to preventing Veteran suicide, VA can’t – and should not – do this alone.”

For Suicide Prevention Month, VA has a number of outreach events planned to raise awareness. Among some of the top events planned:

- A number of declaration signings will be held throughout the month within the entire VA health care system, the Department of Defense, Veteran service organizations and with other partners around the country that show a commitment of solidarity to prevent Veteran suicides.
- Each VA facility will also be asked to commit to Be There, ensuring Veterans get the mental health support they need through a “no wrong door” philosophy. The VA declaration promises:
  - To adopt a “no wrong door” philosophy for suicide prevention so every VA employee will assist Veterans in need;
  - To work with our Community Veteran Engagement Boards or other community partner in suicide prevention efforts;
  - To establish a “buddy system” so Veterans can reach out to someone when needed;
  - To continue implementation of Press 7, for our telephone systems, where feasible, to provide immediate access to the Veterans and Military Crisis Line
  - To establish open access in our facility mental health clinics and same day access in our community based mental health clinics within six months, to ensure prompt attention to the needs of our Veterans;
  - To work across clinical specialties to ensure Veterans receive integrated specialty pain management and sleep services as needed;
  - To ensure all staff and employees clinical suicide prevention training;
  - To arrange appointments for Veterans seeking care through Enhanced Enrollment procedures; and
  - To increase the number of Veterans and providers connecting through our Telemental Health services.
- A suicide prevention toolkit is being distributed around the country to stakeholders and community partners.
- A number of partnerships will be announced including a national network of volunteer professionals at Give an Hour to expand community-based mental health services for Veteran and military communities.
- Outreach efforts will target communities and military units that are experiencing high rates of suicide. We are not waiting until they are in crisis.
- VA is continuing its work with the Department of Defense to identify at-risk service members and enroll them for VA care and engage them through community programs before they transition out of the military, with a day planned in which employees of both departments will be encouraged to wear the same color to show commitment to suicide prevention.
- Monthlong social media events are planned including a Thunderclap, twitter and blog posts; Instagram takeover; Facebook live and other social media media events targeted at suicide prevention.

Veterans in crisis can call the Veterans Crisis Line for confidential support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year at 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat, or text to 838255. Veterans can also visit Make the Connection, a powerful network of stories of recovery, to learn more: http://maketheconnection.net. For more information and resources, visit and VeteransCrisisLine.net/BeThere VeteransCrisisLine.net/SpreadTheWord.

Reporters covering this issue are strongly encouraged to visit www.ReportingOnSuicide.Org for important guidance on ways to communicate on suicide.
WASHINGTON -- The Pentagon has mobilized nearly 30,000 military personnel for recovery operations along Hurricane Irma's devastating path from the U.S. Virgin Islands up to the eastern mainland, where it carried tropical storm-strength winds north of Atlanta, defense officials said Wednesday.

By Wednesday, the bulk of the military response, some 19,000 troops, were focused on Florida, where they were conducting road clearance, supply delivery and search and rescue operations throughout the entire state, according to Pentagon and Florida National Guard spokesmen. Additional troops could be called into the state in the coming days, they said.

Irma impacted virtually all of Florida, hitting the Keys early Sunday as a Category 4 storm and making landfall just south of Naples before moving north into Georgia. Officials have blamed Irma, the most powerful storm ever recorded in the Atlantic Ocean at one point, for more than 60 deaths along the storm's path including more than a dozen in Florida.

Some 8,000 members of Florida's Army and Air National Guard were leading the military response, which officials said could last several weeks as they have in the wake of Hurricane Harvey. Thousands of National Guard troops remain on the ground assisting
with relief operations nearly three weeks after that Category 4 storm struck Texas' coast Aug. 25.

"The next days and weeks will no doubt be trying and exhausting as we begin to rebuild," said Army Maj. Gen. Michael Calhoun, the top Guard officer in Florida. "But no matter what this storm has brought, know that you are not alone."

In addition to search and rescue and route clearance missions, Guard members in Florida were assisting at more than 250 temporary shelters set up throughout the state. In Georgia, 1,100 National Guard members were on duty conducting similar operations, said Desiree Bamba, a Guard spokeswoman.

Five Navy warships full of sailors and Marines were positioned Wednesday off the coast of Florida, primarily to provide aid to the Keys. The ships, carrying dozens of helicopters and tilt-rotor aircraft, were prepared to provide aid wherever they were needed within Florida, according to the Navy. On Tuesday, Marines and sailors operating off those ships delivered more than 52,000 pounds of supplies and equipment to Key West. They were continuing those operations Wednesday, according to a statement from the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit.

Nearly a week after Irma passed through the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico on Sept. 7 as a devastating Category 5 storm, nearly 10,000 U.S. troops were continuing to provide relief operations there, primarily from several Navy ships positioned around the U.S. territory in the Caribbean Sea.

Marine and Navy helicopters from the USS Kearsarge, an amphibious assault ship, and the USS Oak Hill, a dock landing ship, were evacuating people from St. Thomas to St. Croix and delivering supplies to other islands in the American territory, according to a statement from U.S. Northern Command. Marines and National Guard members were conducting road clearance and distributing supplies.

The USS Wasp, an amphibious assault ship, and the USS McLean, a cargo ship, were also conducting relief efforts on the islands, according to the Northern Command statement.

Military personnel have rescued or evacuated more than 1,600 people from hard-hit islands in the American chain, according to the Pentagon.

The Pentagon has described its response to Irma as "massive." The response could grow as large as the military response to Hurricane Katrina in August 2005, when some 50,000 troops helped in relief operations in the wake of the storm that devastated areas of Louisiana and Mississippi.
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 4, 2017

VA Extends Funding to Groups Impacted By Grant and Per Diem Program Changes

One-Year Extension Gives Groups Time to Improve Programs

WASHINGTON — Today, VA Secretary David J. Shulkin announced an extension of funding to organizations that applied for Fiscal Year 2018 grants under VA’s Homeless Providers’ Grant and Per Diem Program, but would be found ineligible due to new program guidelines.

The extension will give those organizations a chance to improve the effectiveness of their programs and an opportunity to apply for funding under an upcoming “notice of funding.”

In a Dec. 23, 2016, Federal Register notice, VA announced it would end per diem payments for all grantees that received awards from VA for fiscal years 1994 to 2016, and that all interested grant programs would have to reapply under updated requirements and acceptance criteria included in the notice. The change allows VA to update its two-decades-old program, which relied on transitional housing for homeless Veterans, to one that equips homeless Veterans with what they need to find permanent housing and independence.

“Our previous Grant and Per Diem Program offered Veterans temporary shelter,” Dr. Shulkin said. “We want our Veterans to have a permanent home. To do that, our homeless programs staff is dedicated to making sure the services and grants we provide to prevent Veteran homelessness are appropriate and based on current needs and approaches.”

A letter will be sent shortly to programs affected by the new guidelines. The letter will provide a randomly generated number, so applicants may review their score in relation to the scores of all other applications, while offering them a one-year extension that allows them to continue operations and improve their application for future Grant and Per Diem Program funding. The Fiscal Year 2018 Grant and Per Diem Program awards to successful grantees will be made in September.

Information about the Grant and Per Diem Program may be found at https://www.va.gov/homeless/GPD.asp. Information about the changes to the program may be found here. Information about VA’s homeless programs is available at www.va.gov/homeless.
1. September Marks Suicide Prevention Month: Suicide is one of the leading causes of death in the United States, and the only cause in the Top 10 that continues to increase rather than decrease in prevalence. While death by suicide is an American issue, it overwhelmingly affects the veteran population, with an average of 20 veterans dying by suicide each day. The VFW has teamed up with five organizations for the VFW Mental Wellness Campaign, including Give an Hour, Campaign to Change Direction, One Mind, PatientsLikeMe and the Elizabeth Dole Foundation. Together our organizations strive to prevent suicide by raising awareness about mental wellness, and foster community engagement to improve research and provide intervention for those who need it. VFW Posts across the globe have held events to change the stigma surrounding mental wellness while supporting fellow veterans in their community. The next major event for Posts will be held Oct. 29. Learn more about the VFW's Mental Wellness Campaign. If you are having a mental health emergency, call the Veteran Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255, and press 1, or learn more here.

2. VFW Clarifies New VA Decision-Ready Claims Initiative: This week VA announced its new Decision-Ready Claims (DRC) initiative, which promises to deliver faster rating decisions to veterans. On the surface, any new option for veterans to access their benefits may sound good, but the reality is that the new program actually puts more responsibility on the veteran to develop the claim before submission — a task VA usually handles on a veteran's behalf. While this may help some veterans with more simple claims or veterans who require flexible timelines to gather evidence, VFW's Service Officers know that DRC will not be the best option for many clients. The VFW encourages all veterans considering filing a claim to have an honest discussion with their accredited VFW Service Officer to determine the best course of action. Learn more about the nuances of the DRC program.
3. **VFW Participates in 2017 Warrior Integration Symposium**: This week, more than 500 veteran and military advocates descended on Atlanta, Ga., for the 2017 Warrior Integration Summit, hosted by America’s Warrior Partnership. This three-day event brings together professionals from across the country in order to share their experiences, identify current and upcoming trends, and discuss potential barriers to progress within our community. As a part of the summit, VFW National Legislative Service Deputy Director John Towles was invited to participate in a panel discussion focusing on the role of veterans service organizations in national advocacy and legislation. 

Learn more here.

4. **VFW Attends Monthly Women Veterans Meeting**: On Wednesday, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Center for Women Veterans hosted the monthly women veterans meeting with the VFW, multiple other veteran service organizations (VSO) and VA employees. During the monthly briefing, the director for VA’s Center for Women Veterans, Kayla Williams, shared upcoming news and information pertaining to women veterans within VA, and VSOs shared information about what their organizations are doing pertaining to women veterans. This month the Embassy of Israel came as special guests to discuss partnering with the VFW and other organizations for better recognition and outreach to female combat veterans. VA gave updates on Suicide Prevention Month, as well as Hurricane Harvey updates including how it affected, and ultimately shortened, VA’s Women Veterans Summit. Williams and her staff are working to post online all the information that would have been disseminated at the summit. Learn more here.

5. **TRICARE Fee Increase**: Last year’s National Defense Authorization Act increased TRICARE costs for military retirees who enter the military after January 1, 2018, and their families. Current military retirees and their family members are exempt from these cost increases, but a proposal which was recently advanced by the Senate would remove this exemption. This proposal would result in higher TRICARE fees for military retirees, including pharmacy copayments, which are already three times higher than they were in 2011, and enrollment costs for certain plans, such as the new Select plan, would nearly triple. The VFW believes that there is an inherent cost to fielding a professional, all-volunteer military, and the promise of a modest stipend immediately upon retirement and inexpensive health care are keys to retaining our best and brightest service members. The VFW needs your help in defeating this harmful proposal which would require military retirees to pay more for their earned health care. TAKE ACTION here.

6. **Disaster Resources**: Disasters, such as hurricanes Harvey and Irma, can cause disruptions in veteran services, such as GI Bill benefits or prescription refills. TRICARE and the Department of Veterans Affairs have published information and guidance on impacts to services and resources for those in the affected areas:

For TRICARE beneficiaries:
https://tricare.mil/Resources/DisasterInfo/DisasterAlerts/09_05_17_PuertoRico_FL_ Irma
https://tricare.mil/Resources/DisasterInfo/DisasterAlerts/08_24_17_Texas_Harvey

For information on VA clinic status and pharmacy benefits:
7. DOD Announces New DPAA Director: The Department of Defense announced on Tuesday that Kelly McKeague has been sworn in as the new director of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA). McKeague, a retired Air Force major general, previously served as the DPAA deputy director and commander of the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command. Acting Director Fern Sumpter Winbush will resume her role as principal deputy director for the agency. Read more here.

8. MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has announced identifications of remains of six American servicemen who had been missing in action from World War II and the Korean and Vietnam Wars. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Samuel W. Crowder**, of Kentucky, was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Crowder was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. Read about Crowder.

- **Marine Corps Pvt. Vernon P. Keaton**, of Oklahoma, was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Keaton was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. Read about Keaton.

- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Elmer D. Nail**, of Kansas, was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Nail was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. Read about Nail.

- **Army Pvt. Raymond Sinowitz**, of New York, was a member of 454th Ordnance Company, 27th Bombardment Group, the Far East Air Force, when Japanese forces invaded the Philippine Islands on Dec. 8, 1941. After months of intense fighting, Corregidor fell and American forces surrendered on May 6, 1942. Sinowitz was one of the thousands of U.S. and Filipino service members taken prisoner and eventually moved to Cabanatuan POW camp. Interment services are pending. Read about Sinowitz.

- **Navy Hospital Corpsman 1st Class William G. Payne**, of Chicago, Ill., was a medical specialist assigned to the 7th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division. In late November 1950, Payne’s unit was fighting against repeat attacks by Chinese forces in the area surrounding Yudam-ni, North Korea. Payne was killed during the fighting on Dec. 1, 1950 and was reportedly buried in a temporary cemetery at Yudam-ni. Interment services are pending. Read about Payne.

- **Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Donald J. Hall**, of Stroud, Okla., was a member of Detachment 5, 38th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron. On Feb. 6, 1967, Hall and three other service members were flying an HH-3E helicopter on a rescue and recovery mission over northern Vietnam. Hall’s helicopter was hit by enemy ground fire after rescuing a downed pilot, resulting in an internal explosion and crash. Hall was subsequently reported missing in action. Interment services are pending. Read about Hall.

As always, we want to hear your advocacy stories. To share your stories or photos with us, simply email them directly to vfwac@vfw.org.
A Marine veteran who left the service as a staff sergeant had his Silver Star award upgraded to the prestigious Navy Cross in a ceremony Thursday presided over by a two-star general.

Eric Smith, a native of Waxahachie, Texas, was presented by Maj. Gen. Paul Kennedy, head of Marine Corps Recruiting Command, with the military's second-highest valor award in recognition of his heroic actions while serving in Ramadi, Iraq, in 2004.

The medal was upgraded to the Navy Cross as part of an awards review initiated by the Pentagon in early 2011 to ensure that troops serving in wars after Sept. 11, 2001, were properly recognized for their heroism.

Smith's Navy Cross is the 40th presented to a Marine since the Sept. 11 attacks, officials said.

"I am honored and humbled to receive the upgraded award of the Navy Cross," Smith said in a statement.
"I understand that this places me in a category of Marines that I would have never imagined to be a part of," he said. "I firmly believe that I was an ordinary Marine placed in an extraordinary situation."

In the medal presentation ceremony in Irving, Texas, Kennedy described the incident in which Smith's heroism took place.

It was April 6, 2004, and, after a relatively peaceful time early in the deployment of 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines, "the streets of Ramadi erupted into flames" as insurgents waged what would be an intense three-day war on the American troops, he said.

As units were pinned down around the city, quick-reaction forces were dispatched to provide reinforcement and a way out.

Smith, who had been supposed to rest ahead of a patrol the next day, was called upon to go out with a makeshift QRF when other assets were exhausted.

He was teamed with a lieutenant and a staff sergeant, who raced into Ramadi to save another squad when they themselves were ambushed.

"The lieutenant was killed, and the staff sergeant was killed, and somebody had to step up to lead those Marines to safety," Kennedy said. "You heard what he did in the citation. He did it out of the love of the people he was fighting for, his comrades."

Twelve Marines were killed that day, and 33 Marines and a Navy corpsman from 2/4 would die over the course of the deployment to Ramadi.

According to the citation for Smith's Silver Star, presented in 2006, the Marine -- then a corporal and a squad leader -- was, as part of the QRF, ordered to reinforce a squad being attacked by the enemy. On the way to the objective, two Marine Humvees were ambushed, and the platoon commander critically wounded in the attack.

"Under heavy machine gun and rocket-propelled grenade fire, Corporal Smith assumed command of the platoon, and led them 50 meters across open ground to covered positions," Smith's citation reads. "He then ran back across the fire-swept field to evacuate his platoon commander and his weapons."

For Smith, the day was not done. He then used machine guns and his platoon's 7-ton truck to lead a counterattack against the local insurgent forces, accomplishing the original mission of rescuing the isolated squad.

Then, according to the citation, he worked with an Army Bradley fighting vehicle platoon to evacuate casualties and work out a plan for all units involved in the fight to return to safety.
"By his bold leadership, wise judgment, and loyal dedication to duty, Corporal Smith reflected great credit upon himself and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service," the citation reads.

Smith is now a paramedic with the Irving, Texas, Fire Department and a member of the Texas Task Force 2 Urban Search and Rescue team, according to an autobiographical statement provided by Marine Corps officials.

He is also attending Navarro College, where he is pursuing degrees in fire officer and emergency management administration.

In brief remarks at his ceremony, Smith remained humble about what he had done.

"I'm honored and humbled to be singled out against a sea of deserving Marines," he said. "The significance of this award is not lost on me, and I will wear it with pride."

It is fitting that Smith should be the 40th Marine to receive the Navy Cross since the Sept. 11 attacks, as he was a student at the School of Infantry when the towers fell.

"On 9/11, we were checking out gas masks from supply when the towers were struck," he said in his autobiographical statement. "And I knew I would not serve a peacetime enlistment."

-- Hope Hodge Seck can be reached at hope.seck@military.com. Follow her on Twitter at @HopeSeck.
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For More Info: Chris Hall, Esq., Hall & Lampros, LLP, 404-876-8100, 404-226-7480 (M), chall@hallandlampros.com

Tracy Markham, Esq. Avolio & Hanlon, PC, 904-794-7005(O), 904-806-3531 (M), tlm@avoliohanlonfl.com

50K Florida USAA Auto Policyholders to Receive Past-Due Sales Tax Averaging More Than $450 Each if They Make a Claim

(Jacksonville, Fla.) USAA insurance companies agreed to pay an average of more than $450 in past-due sales tax to approximately 50,000 Florida auto policyholders who experienced total loss claims, based on plaintiff’s calculations in a class action lawsuit settlement.

The settlement provides for payments of up to approximately $34 million. Notice of the settlement will be sent to more than 70,000 policyholders. Plaintiffs calculate that approximately 70% of these policyholders (approximately 50,000) will recover funds under the settlement if they timely submit pre-filled-in claim forms. USAA also agreed to no longer condition the payment of sales tax on the policyholder first purchasing a replacement vehicle.

Each class member will receive an email and mailing from Settlement Administrator Dahl Administration explaining how to make a claim. Claims can be made by mail or at the website USAAFloridaAutoSalesTaxSettlement.com.

All 70,000 total loss policyholders can submit a claim asking USAA to review their file to determine whether there was sales tax underpayment, and in turn USAA will pay the policyholder 108% of any sales tax that should have been paid.

The 2013 lawsuit claims USAA improperly withheld sales tax from total loss payments to auto policyholders. Class members include present and former USAA Florida policyholders who held auto insurance with a USAA company and were paid by USAA under their policy for a total loss to their automobile between October 13, 2008 and October 15, 2016.

Policyholders will receive payment only if they make a timely claim. Approximately 30% of policyholders with total loss claims received all sales tax due from USAA as part of their total loss, and will receive no payment even if they make a claim.

MISSING IN AMERICA PROJECT

“IT’S THE RIGHT THING TO DO”

The Missing in America Project (MIAP) is a registered 501(c)3 Non-profit Corporation. Our intention is to locate, identify and inter the unclaimed cremains of American veterans. Missing in America Project was launched nationwide in January, 2007.

NATIONWIDE PROGRESS AS OF 8/20/2017

Total Funeral Homes Visited - 2,127
Cremains Found - 15,167
Veterans Cremains Identified - 3,464
Veterans Interred - 3,174

FLORIDA’S PROGRESS AS OF 8/24/2017

Total Funeral Homes Visited – 124
Cremains Found – 1,000
Veterans Interred – 152
Spouses Interred – 72
Dependents Interred – 1
Missions pending - 43
Call to Honors = 12

Not only has MIAP interred so many as of today, we have also reunited families with their loved ones. MIAP also works with Medical Examiner’s Offices, hospitals, nursing homes, Police Departments, etc.

Our next CALL TO HONOR will be on Saturday, October 21, 2017 at the South Florida National Cemetery, Lake Worth, FL.

MIAP Florida volunteers will continue to do research and reach out to funeral homes during the summer but due to the hot weather we will not have any more services until the fall (November).

There are many ways one can get involved with MIAP. Please go to our website @ www.miap.us for more info. You may also contact me at my info listed below.

“YOU ARE NOT FORGOTTEN”
Caring for the Military/Veteran Caregiver: A Family Caregiving Conference

Your service as a caregiver to a veteran is unlike the experience of any other caregiver. Join us for a day dedicated to exploring the rewards and challenges unique to those who care for men and women who have served our country.

Presentations Led by Caregiving Experts Will Include:

- Journey of the Military Caregiver: Your Own Special Battle
- Vietnam Veterans: Untold Stories at the End of Life
- Operation Family Caregiver: An Evidence-Based Program (EBP) Providing Free and Confidential Support to Military Caregivers
- VA Caregiver Support Program: There’s Help for You
- Preservation of Assets
- Caregiving & Intimacy

Friday, Sept. 22, 2017
WJCT Public Broadcasting
100 Festival Park Ave., Jacksonville, FL 32202

Registration 8:30 a.m.
Program 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Registration is free, and a complimentary breakfast and lunch will be provided. REGISTER ONLINE

To request complimentary respite care for your loved one, call Aging True Community Senior Services at 904.807.1319 by Friday, Sept. 15.

Continuing education credit will be available for eligible professional disciplines. See the registration website for CE details and learning objectives.

Caregiver Coalition Partners: Community Hospice & Palliative Care; AARP; Aging True Community Senior Services; Alzheimer’s Association; Area Councils on Aging; Baptist Agnew Center for Senior Health; Brooks Rehabilitation; City of Jacksonville; Senior Services Division; Enersource; Jewish Family and Community Services; Mayo Clinic Florida; YMCA of Florida’s First Coast
WHEREAS, on August 14, 1945, the United States greeted the end of World War II and the news of the Allies’ noble victory with joyous celebration, humility and spiritual reflection; and

WHEREAS, the victory 72 years ago marked the culmination of an unprecedented national effort that brought freedom to the world and ended the horrors of the Holocaust; and

WHEREAS, these historic accomplishments were achieved through the collective service and personal sacrifice of the people of the United States, both those who served in uniform and those who supported them on the Home Front, and the more than 400,000 Americans who gave their lives in service to their country during World War II; and

WHEREAS, Florida is proudly home to more than 65,000 World War II veterans; and

WHEREAS, the courage, dedication, self-sacrifice and compassion of the “ordinary heroes” of the World War II generation continue to inspire our nation, especially the men and women who are currently serving around the world protecting our country; and

WHEREAS, the entire World War II generation, military and civilian alike, has provided a model of national unity and community that will continue to serve as a source of inspiration for current and future generations of Americans to come together to work for the continued prosperity of the United States and the world;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Rick Scott, Governor of the State of Florida, do hereby extend greetings and best wishes to all observing August 14, 2017, as Spirit of ’45 Day.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Great Seal of the State of Florida to be affixed at Tallahassee, the Capital, this third day of August, in the year two thousand seventeen.

Governor