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1. Post-9/11 Military Disability Ratings Could Increase: Veterans discharged between Sept. 11, 2001, and Dec. 31, 2009, with disability ratings of 20% or lower, are being urged to apply for a review of their military medical disability rating. In January, the VA and Defense Department's Physical Disability Board of Review, or PDBR, hope to begin sending letters to thousands of Post-9/11 veterans to urge them to apply for the review. Congress created the PDBR to address inconsistent disability ratings between the four services, and to determine if some veterans are eligible for increased ratings. Currently, only 3,000 out of 77,000 eligible veterans have applied for the review, with half receiving upgrades to 30% or more, which would make them eligible for a military medical retirement, retiree pay, access to military healthcare and other benefits. The hard part, according to officials, is finding these new veterans, which is where VFW members can help. If you know a Post-9/11 veteran who was separated with a low disability rating, tell him or her to go online to www.health.mil, click the "About MHS" link atop the page, and then click the "Physical Disability Board of Review" link. They'll thank you for it later.

2. Rules Ease for Undiagnosed Gulf War Illnesses: Veterans of the Persian Gulf War with undiagnosed illnesses now have an additional five years to qualify for VA benefits. A recent change in VA regulations affects veterans of the conflict in Southwest Asia. Many have attributed a range of undiagnosed or poorly understood medical problems to their military services, with chemical weapons, environmental hazards and vaccinations among the possible causes. At issue is the eligibility to claim VA disability compensation based upon those undiagnosed illnesses, and the ability of survivors to qualify for VA's Dependency and Indemnity Compensation. Under long-standing VA rules, any undiagnosed illnesses used to establish eligibility for VA benefits must become apparent by Dec. 31 (tomorrow). The new change pushes the date back to Dec. 31, 2016. Read more at <http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2239>.

3. TRICARE Loses Walgreens: It appears there will be no last-minute contract agreement between Walgreens and Defense Department contractor Express Scripts, which means beginning Jan. 1, military TRICARE beneficiaries will no longer be able to fill their prescriptions at a Walgreens pharmacy. Beneficiaries who need help finding an alternate pharmacy or to switch their medications to home delivery can contact Express Scripts at 1-877-885-6313. Read more at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=66626>.

4. VFW Legislative Review: As the year ends and the first session of the 112th Congress comes to a close, the VFW would like to thank all of our advocates who helped us fight to create, protect and enhance the services and benefits provided to America's service members, veterans

and their families. It is because of you that we were able to get four critical bills passed into law:

- **P.L. 112-56, VOW to Hire Heroes Act** – a comprehensive jobs bill that improves reemployment rights for Guard and Reservist, expands education and training programs, requires mandatory Transitional Assistance Program attendance, and offers employer tax credits for hiring veterans.

- **P.L. 112-53, Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2011**, increases the rates of VA disability compensation and dependency and indemnity compensation for surviving spouses and children by 3.6%, which matches the COLA increase military retirees and Social Security recipients will receive.

- **P.L. 112-37, Veterans Health Care Facilities Capital Improvement Act of 2011**, legislation that authorizes major medical projects and leases within VA, and expands mental health treatments, rehabilitation and comprehensive homeless veteran housing programs.

- **P.L. 112-26, Restoring GI Bill Fairness Act of 2011**, provides a fix in reimbursement rates under the Post-9/11 GI Bill for students already enrolled at private schools.

There are other bills passed by the House that still await Senate action. They include mortgage protections for service members, harsher penalties for misrepresenting a business as owned or controlled by service-disabled veterans, sexual assault prevention measures within VA, and improvements to the disability claims and appeals process. For a list of VFW-supported legislation, go to <http://stage.vfw.org/VFW-in-DC/Action-Corps/>. For more about the public laws, go to <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/thomas.php>.

From the entire VFW family to yours, have a safe and joyous New Years!