

This Veterans Newsletter is compiled and provided by the Seminole County Veteran's Services Office. Its intent is to keep Seminole County Veterans informed about their rights, benefits, and news of interest. It is non-political and, except where noted, all articles are excerpted from outside sources. Local events honoring/supporting Veterans will be included as made available. You are encouraged to provide feedback and recommendations, as this is your Newsletter. Together with my small Team, I hope you find it both valuable and interesting.

Ed Burford, Seminole County Veterans Services Officer

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1. Limited manning at the Seminole County Veterans Service Office: Beginning Monday March 23, 2020, The Coronavirus is a severe acute respiratory illness that can spread among humans through respiratory transmission and presents with symptoms similar to those of influenza. A Public Health Emergency has been declared in the State of Florida as has been a "state of emergency for the entire State of Florida", Executive Order Number 20-52, March 9, 2020. Beginning Monday March 23, 2020, the Seminole County Veterans Services Office will reduce its manning to 50% working in the office and 50% working remotely. Walk-ins have already been postponed until after this crisis. We will attempt to conduct as much business via telephone as possible and when necessary we will make an appointment. We will return calls, but because of this precaution, a return call may not be immediately.

If necessary, you may call the VA direct at 1-800-827-1000 or you can walk-in at the Lake Nona and Lake Baldwin VA Medical Center and Clinic.

We ask for your continued understanding and support. We encourage you to self-isolate and keep your social distance and please do not hoard.

2. Stay Informed: Veterans Florida, March 23, 2020, as we all take necessary precautions against the spread of the coronavirus, Veterans Florida is still here for you. Our staff is working reduced hours from home, and we stand ready to hear from those who need career, business, or other resource recovery assistance. We're in regular contact with state officials and are compiling available resources like the small business Emergency Bridge Loan Program on our continuously updating [Recovery Resources](#).

3. Beware of Scam donation solicitations! American Legion, Department of Florida, April 7, 2020, as with holidays, and natural disasters and other times of emergency, the Coronavirus pandemic has brought out those attempting to scam people wanting to assist others. Any solicitations for donations should first be confirmed as legitimate before donating. Anytime you receive an email from someone you know or any other email that you are unsure about, always reach out to the "supposed" sender and verify the requests. Use the contact information you have, DO NOT REPLY to the email, because then you are just asking the scammer. When in doubt, reach out!

4. Welcome Freddy Spano: Your Seminole County Veterans Service Office is excited to welcome Freddy Spano as a member of the Veterans Service Office team. He is a retired United States Air Force Senior Master Sergeant with a 22-year career in law enforcement and security. While recently employed with TSA, he performed Veterans' claims processing in past years and is eager to again work with Veterans in this capacity once he obtains updated Veterans' benefits training and recertification. He will then assume the position as Assistant Veteran Service Officer in Seminole County. Freddy emphasizes "I am a helper of people, a studious researcher aiming to be the most reliable advisor I can be to my employer and clients and a devoted counselor and mentor to those in need. My passion for helping others has been evident in my involvement in counseling, advising and serving Veterans, their widows and their dependent children." On behalf of Cathy and myself, welcome to the team Freddy.

5. Tricare Must Waive Coronavirus Test Visit Copays, But Not Off-Base Pharmacy Fees: Military.com, 7 Apr 2020, [Tricare](#) users who typically face copays for off-base doctor visits and tests will not owe anything out of pocket for the appointment if they are receiving a coronavirus test, but those required to head off-base for prescriptions must pay any related costs themselves, Military.com has learned. The fee waiver is included in coronavirus-related legislation passed last month, known as the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. The law requires that all fees be waived for both the virus test itself and any visit associated with getting the test. [Read more.](#)

6. Army ECHOES: The Official Newsletter for Retired Soldiers, Surviving Spouses & Families, March 25, 2020, the newest edition of Army Echoes is now available. Download current edition by clicking on the link below or by using your Army Echoes app (iOS and Android): Army Echoes is the Army's official newsletter for Retired Soldiers and surviving spouses. It updates the retired Army community about changes to laws, policies, programs, and benefits that affect them. All Retired Soldiers and surviving spouses with active myPay accounts now receive Army Echoes electronically at their email address in myPay. Current edition: <https://soldierforlife.army.mil/Documents/echoes/latest.pdf>

7. The Military Coalition Keeps Up the Fire on Concurrent Receipt MOAA: March 25, 2020, The Military Coalition (TMC), a group of military and veteran service organizations representing a combined 5.5 million-plus membership, recently signed two important letters of support in the fight for [concurrent receipt](#). MOAA, a co-chair of the 34-member TMC, already has expressed its support for both measures: Last week, The Military Coalition (TMC) released a letter asking the president to continue his support for states responding to COVID-19 by activating members of the National Guard on Title 32 federally funded orders. This follows in the wake of National Guard members in New York, California, and Washington being activated on these orders. Since the letter was released, Louisiana, New Jersey, and the District of Columbia [also have been placed](#) on Title 32 orders. [Read more.](#)

8. DoD Considers Stop-Loss Order to Maintain Troop Levels During Pandemic: Military.com, 8 Apr 2020, The Defense Department is considering bringing back "stop-loss" orders as a last resort to keep troops in the ranks past their separation dates in the ongoing fight against the novel coronavirus, according to Pentagon officials. The possibility that the drastic step of employing stop-loss, [first reported by The Washington Times](#), is even being considered

underlines the growing strain on the military in ramping up efforts to assist in battling the pandemic. [Read more.](#)

9. USPHS Ready Reserve Corps Becomes Law with the CARES Act MOAA: April 14, 2020, The U.S. Public Health Service, whose Commissioned Corps officers are deployed across the country and abroad fighting COVID-19, has received the greenlight to build a reserve corps. The CARES Act, which passed into law March 27, includes the U.S. Public Health Service Modernization Act, S. 2629, providing for a ready reserve corps to fill the need for an additional commissioned corps for emergency response missions. [MOAA advocated](#) for the measure along with 30 other veteran service organizations in The Military Coalition. [Read more.](#)

10. MOAA Joins Call to Use Title 32 Orders for National Guard MOAA: April 2, 2020, "As the primary uniformed military first responders to homeland emergencies such as the current crisis, National Guard Soldiers and Airmen deserve full federal support and benefits," states the letter from the coalition, on which MOAA serves as a co-chair. [Read more.](#)

11. Your Benefits: Title 10 vs. Title 32 vs. the State MOAA: March 10, 2020 serving in the Guard means you serve two bosses: the governor and the president. Keeping score of your earned benefits under the two bosses can be confusing. Federal authority over servicemembers falls under Title 10 of the U.S. Code. These laws apply to active duty, reservists, and Guard members who are ordered to federal-level active duty for federal-level missions. Funding comes from the federal government. The president is the boss. [Read more.](#)

12. What's the Difference Between Title 10 and Title 32 Mobilization Orders? Military.com, 9 Apr 2020, [National Guard](#) members being mobilized for active service may find that their orders mention Title 10 or Title 32 of the United States Code (U.S.C.), but what exactly does that mean and what is the difference? To the average soldier, there is no difference -- so long as their orders are for more than 30 days. [Read more.](#)

13. What You Need to Know About the CARES Act MOAA: March 31, 2020, By now, most of our readers are aware that Congress passed, and the president signed, the \$2 trillion [Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security \(CARES\) Act](#) to assist individuals, as well as small and large businesses, directly affected by the coronavirus outbreak. Your MOAA Financial Education Team put together the below summary of key provisions that will most impact the military and veteran community. [Read more.](#)

14. More than ever before, we must focus on our emotional well-being: VAverage Point, *April 2, 2020, More than ever before, all Americans, including Veterans, must pay attention to our emotional well-being and the well-being of those we love as we cope with the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This isn't an option – it's a necessity. Just as washing our hands, disinfecting surfaces and maintaining physical distance is required to minimize the impact of this pandemic, so too is caring for our mental health and the mental health of those around us. In response to this emergency, we need a fundamental shift in how we promote and maintain our mental health. [Read more.](#)

15. The best photos of the US military in 2019, according to an award-winning Air Force

photographer Task & Purpose: April 7, 2020, Tech Sgt. Chris Hibben had just stepped out of the shower at a base in Libreville, Gabon, when he saw a group of U.S. soldiers heading towards a meeting in a half-closed garage. It was well after dark, and the light shining down from the garage ceiling cast the soldiers' bodies in sharp relief to one another. Hibben dried off, grabbed his camera and shot a few frames, unaware that, a year later, one of the shots would help him win the prize of top military photographer of 2019. [Read more.](#)

16. 5 Differences Between Army and Marine Corps Infantry: Military.com, 6 Apr 2020, The U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps infantrymen pride themselves on being some of the biggest bad asses on every block they roll into. They have more similarities than differences, but they are unique forces. Here are 5 ways you can tell Marine and Army infantry apart: [Read more.](#)

17. Pentagon Extends ID Card Expiration Dates, Allows Mail Order for Some: Military.com, 8 Apr 2020, Military dependent and retiree ID cards set to expire this year will get an automatic extension through September, while some other ID card updates and enrollments are now permitted by fax or mail, [according to new Pentagon guidance.](#) [Read more.](#)

18. All Commissary and Exchange Customers Must Now Wear Face Coverings: MOAA, April 11, 2020, Both the Defense Commissary Activity and Navy Exchange (NEX) have announced that all patrons must be wearing some form of face covering before they will be granted entry into any facility. The stores will not provide masks or face coverings to customers. The new face covering order applies to visitors and employees at all NEX and [commissary](#) outlets, including mini-marts, gas stations and Navy Lodges. [Read more.](#)

19. 35,000 Military Retirees Will Soon See a Tricare Refund: Military.com, 17 Apr 2020, About 35,000 military retirees will soon receive cash refunds from [Tricare](#), thanks to a policy change made last year that affects how Tricare calculates annual out-of-pocket maximum [payments](#). The rebates impact retirees with [Tricare Prime](#) who paid more than \$2,400 out of pocket towards their annual maximum payment in 2018 and 2019. They do not impact [Tricare for Life](#) or [Tricare Retired Reserve](#) users. [Read more.](#)

20. VA extends financial, benefits and claims relief to Veterans: News Release, April 3, 2020, The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced, April 3, a number of actions to provide Veterans with financial, benefits and claims help amid VA's COVID-19 response. "As all Americans come together to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, we want Veterans to be focused on their health and safety," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "That's why we're taking action to give those with pending debts, claims and appeals greater flexibility during these challenging times." [Read more.](#)

21. VA expands virtual services to support Veterans amid regional office closures due to COVID-19 pandemic: VA News Release, March 31, 2020, – Veterans continue to receive benefits and services after the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) temporarily closed its [56 regional offices](#) to the public, March 19, in response to COVID-19. [Read more.](#)

22. Board of Veterans Appeals now holding virtual hearings: #VetResources, March 26, 2020, Veterans now have the option to participate in their Board of Veterans Appeals hearing from the comfort of their own home. With nationwide availability of virtual hearing technology, Veterans have greater access to Board hearings—and more choice and control in their appeals. [Read more.](#)

23. 'Fourth Mission': How the VA Plans to Help All Americans in the Coronavirus Fight: MOAA, March 30, 2020, most veterans and their families – and, I venture to say, most Americans – are unaware of the "Fourth Mission" associated with the VA health care system. In light of this global pandemic, it may well be the most important and critical mission VA is asked to perform this century. In recent years, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has frequently been tapped to provide emergency management response and disaster relief in times of crisis, such as hurricanes, floods, and fires. That authority stems from the 1982 VA/DoD Health Resources Sharing and Emergency Operation Act ([P.L. 97-174](#)) and was expanded by the Federal Response Plan in 1992. [Read more.](#)

24. Blue Water Navy Veterans received \$140M in retroactive benefits in January, February: VAnatage Point, April 2, 2020, Blue Water Navy Veterans and survivors who filed compensation claims in January and February 2020 have so far received over \$140 million in retroactive benefits. This information can be found in a new monthly report published on the 10th business day of each month to inform Veterans and other stakeholders about BWN claims decisions. [Read more.](#)

25. Trump Orders VA to Stop Withholding Money from Veterans: Military.com, 3 Apr 2020, in reaction to the national emergency caused by the novel coronavirus, President Donald Trump has directed the [Department of Veterans Affairs \(VA\)](#) to stop withholding payments or benefits from veterans who have a debt with the agency. [Read more.](#)

26. VA Expands Virtual Services in Support of Social Distancing: Military.com, 1 Apr 2020, The [Department of Veterans Affairs \(VA\)](#) is transitioning from in-person communications to telephone and internet meetings with veterans in this time of national emergency. On March 19, the VA closed all 56 of its regional offices to the public in response to the national pandemic but continues to provide much-needed benefits to veterans and their dependents despite the lack of in-person contact. [Read more.](#)

27. VFW Opposes VA Decision to Eliminate Review Period for Claims: Military.com, 3 Apr 2020, The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) has strongly denounced a [Department of Veterans Affairs \(VA\)](#) decision that removes it and other veterans service organizations (VSOs) from the final review of a vet's disability claim. In a [late March news release](#), VFW National Commander William "Doc" Schmitz called it "despicable" and "inconceivable" that the VA intends to eliminate the VSO 48-hour review period for claims, effective April 30. The release states that Paul Lawrence, the VA undersecretary of benefits, announced the change at a recent meeting with Veterans groups. VSOs are nonprofit organizations such as the VFW, American Legion and Disabled American Veterans that help veterans navigate the often-confusing world of veteran's benefits and submit the sometimes difficult to understand multi-page applications for benefits related to disabilities incurred during their military service. [Read more.](#)

28. VA Removes Disability Benefits Questionnaires from Public View: Military.com, 3 Apr 2020, citing abuse of the system, the [Department of Veterans Affairs \(VA\)](#) has removed Disability Benefits Questionnaires (DBQs) from its public websites. DBQs are standardized forms used by clinicians performing disability examinations (also known as Compensation & Pension exams, or C&P exams). A disability examination must usually be completed by a physician before the VA will pay a veteran [disability benefits](#). [Read more.](#)

29. Meet Annie: This VA App Helps Patients Track Appointments, Health Care Goals, and More: MOAA, April 15, 2020, With each buzz on their cellphones, veterans can get closer to their health goals by having "Annie," a virtual, automated nurse, remind them to put out their cigarettes, go for a walk, or check their blood pressure levels. "Annie's kind of like a nurse that you have in your pocket," said Neil Evans, chief officer of VA's Office of Connected Care, which created the Annie program. "She's able to deliver messages to remind veterans about the care plan that they've worked out with their VA care provider." [Read more.](#)

30. Using VA Video Connect to guard against infection: Vantage Point, March 25, 2020, using video telehealth appointments, you can connect with your VA care teams from anywhere, without traveling and exposing yourself, your family and other Veterans to COVID-19. Using video telehealth appointments, you can connect with your VA care teams from anywhere, without traveling and exposing yourself, your family, and other Veterans to COVID-19. [Read more.](#)

31. Here's What Will Happen if the VA Runs out of Space for Patients: Military.com, 28 Mar 2020, The [Department of Veterans Affairs](#) is beginning to divide its inpatient units into two zones to separate non-infectious patients from those with novel [coronavirus](#), officials said. And when the need arises, as the new phased plan predicts it will, officials plan to discharge non-critical patients and even build new facilities. The plan is part of a four-phased [pandemic response](#) blueprint released Friday, weeks after [the VA was criticized](#) for not publicly disclosing its plan to help veterans and the federal government respond to the [COVID-19](#) pandemic. [Read more.](#)

32. Coronavirus Relief Bill Contains Nearly \$20 Billion for Veterans: Military.com, 25 Mar 2020, The massive \$330 billion [coronavirus](#) relief bill expected to be approved Wednesday by the Senate contains \$19.57 billion for the [Department of Veterans Affairs](#) to ensure that veterans are receiving the care they need during the current pandemic. According to a release from Senate Appropriations Committee Vice Chairman Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vermont, \$15.85 billion of the VA-marked funds will go to the Veterans Health Administration to cover treatment for veterans with [COVID-19](#) at VA hospitals, civilian urgent care clinics and emergency rooms. The funds are to be used for overtime for staff, personal protective equipment, test kits and other resources. [Read more.](#)

33. VA Intends to Pause Community Care Program during Coronavirus Pandemic: Military.com via Stars and Stripes, 25 Mar 2020, WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs plans to pause its community care program for 90 days in order to free space across private health care systems for coronavirus patients and prevent veterans' exposure. The

department will stop automatically sending veterans outside of the VA for non-urgent and routine appointments. In an email to members of Congress on Tuesday night, officials said the VA will review appointment requests on a case-by-case basis and determine whether to refer veterans to private doctors. The VA will continue to refer veterans to the community for urgent medical needs "when necessary." [Read more.](#)

34. Coronavirus Update: VA Programs, DoD Response, Surgery Delays, and More: MOAA, March 25, 2020, The COVID-19 threat has prompted frequent policy changes, updated guidance, and multiple event cancellations as federal and local agencies of all types attempt to contain the virus. Below, you'll find links to some of these updates, as well as fact sheets and other related materials. Please note: These materials were compiled by MOAA on March 25; expect some of them to be overcome by events in the near future. For the latest information, and for details on what you should do if you suspect you've been exposed to the virus, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [COVID-19 website](#). [Read more.](#)

35. Coronavirus cause for concern among burn pit veterans: Fox News, March 24, 2020, the coronavirus pandemic has wreaked havoc across the country, especially among those with chronic respiratory problems and compromised immune systems. These include 9/11 first responders and veterans who were exposed to the toxic plumes that emanated from burn pits. Both groups constitute large parts of a population living with a higher risk of serious complications from COVID-19. "We are taking a lot of caution," said Will Thompson, a veteran from West Virginia, who had a double lung transplant in the past decade due to his exposure to burn pits in Mosul, Iraq. [Read more.](#)

36. Dozens More Military Bases Have Suspected 'Forever Chemical' Contamination: Military.com, 3 Apr 2020, The number of military installations with known contamination or suspected discharges of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, continues to rise, according to an environmental advocacy group keeping tally based on information obtained from the Defense Department. According to a report released Thursday by the Washington, D.C.-based Environmental Working Group (EWG), [678 installations are either contaminated or had suspect discharges of PFAS](#) compounds used in firefighting foams. [Read more.](#)

37. It Just Got Easier for Veterans Who Don't File Taxes to Get a Coronavirus Check: The Penny Hoarder via Military.com, 16 Apr 2020, The IRS has released a feature on its website that will get you your coronavirus relief check faster if you aren't required to file a tax return. The [Non-filers Enter Payment Info Here](#) feature debuted on the IRS website on April 10. For several weeks, the [IRS had urged](#) people who don't file taxes or receive Social Security benefits to file a simple tax return to speed up the payment process. [Read more.](#)

38. DAV Offering Cash Grants to Disabled Veterans Affected by COVID-19: Military.com, 13 Apr 2020, Disabled American Veterans (DAV) is offering cash grants of up to \$250 for disabled veterans affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Service-connected disabled veterans who have lost employment as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic are eligible. This includes veterans who are self-employed as contractors or small business owners. [Read more.](#)

39. These Companies Are Refunding Members' Auto Policy Premiums: Military.com 8 Apr 2020, in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, many auto insurance companies are offering their customers refunds on policy premium payments. Due to shelter-in-place orders in most states, there are fewer drivers on the road and, consequently, fewer automobile accidents. As a result, some companies are refunding money normally paid out in claims back to their policyholders. [Read more.](#)

40. Wounded Warrior Project Pledges \$10 Million to Help Vets in Crisis Amid Pandemic: Military.com, 9 Apr 2020, One of the most prominent and well-funded organizations serving wounded troops and their families announced Thursday it's committing \$10 million to help meet the most pressing needs of those in its community who are in economic straits due to the novel coronavirus pandemic. Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) will contact all the [wounded warriors](#) registered in its database to locate those in financial stress, the organization said in an announcement. Those who can't cover food or housing costs due to loss of household income can apply for a \$1,000 grant. [Read more.](#)

41. New Law Helps You Delay Mortgage Payments and Prevent Foreclosure: Military.com, 10 Apr 2020, If you've been financially affected by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, you may be wondering how you are going to make upcoming mortgage payments. There is help available. A new federal law, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, gives you two new financial protections if you have a federally backed mortgage: [Read more.](#)

42. Dear Candidate: MOAA's Message to All Those Up and Down the Ballot in 2020: MOAA, April 14, 2020, Dear Candidate, Every election year, candidates and their staffs reach out to the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) and other advocacy groups seeking insights on the needs of the military community – problems to be fixed, benefits to be protected, services that have gone neglected. The odds are the highest in 50 years that a candidate will not have military experience. Even those who've served may not be up to speed on the needs of current and former members of our nation's uniformed services – our armed services as well as the U.S. Public Health Service and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. [Read more.](#)

43. Here are all the financial resources for troops and veterans hurt by the COVID-19 pandemic: Task & Purpose, April 16, 2020, as the public health crisis posed by COVID-19 worsens, many Americans across the country are experiencing significant financial shock. Servicemembers, veterans, and military families are no exception. Although veterans will continue to receive their benefits and active-duty servicemembers will continue to receive their pay, some military personnel and their families are facing financial strain due to lost employment or changes in military orders. If you need financial assistance as a result of the pandemic, there is help. [Read more.](#)

44. Women should have to register for the Draft, Congressional Commission Says: Military.com, 24 Mar 2020, a commission formed by Congress to assess military and national service is calling for women to be included in selective service registration, Military.com has learned. The 11-member National Commission on Military, National and Public Service is set to release a final report with 164 recommendations Wednesday, following two-and-a-half years of

research and fieldwork on topics including propensity to serve in the military; the civilian-military divide; and the future of the U.S. Selective Service System. [Read more.](#)

45. Emergency Act to Preserve GI Bill Payments Becomes Law: Military.com, Week of March 23, 2020, with schools across the nation shutting down or moving to online-only instruction, the Department of Veterans Affairs will be making changes in how GI Bill payments are administered. It literally took an act of Congress, but students who are affected by the move from classroom lessons to online courses will not see their GI Bill payments stop. [Read more.](#)

Are you a Veteran in crisis or concerned about one?

Did you know that VA offers same day services in Primary Care and Mental Health at 172 VA Medical Centers across the country? [Make the Connection Resource Locator](#)
Contact the [Veterans Crisis Line](#) ([1-800-273-8255](tel:1-800-273-8255) and press 1, [Chat](#), or Text 838255.)