



**Federal Update
for
Oct. 28 – Nov. 1, 2013**



State Veterans Cemetery in SE Minnesota to Break Ground

SAINT PAUL, Minn. -The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) will break ground Nov. 8 at 11 a.m. on a new State Veterans Cemetery in Southeastern Minnesota. The 169-acre site was donated by Fillmore County and is located just off Highway 52 in Preston, Minn.

Earlier this month MDVA received official approval of the \$10 million construction grant from the Federal Cemetery Administration for this project.

“We are pleased to expand burial service to Veterans in Southeastern Minnesota, where more than 50,000 Veterans live,” said Larry Shellito, Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs Commissioner. “Often, burial is the only benefit our Veterans claim. This generous land donation from Fillmore County was the first step toward completing the new cemetery and honoring our heroes.”

Olympic Builders General Contractors, Inc. has been awarded the construction grant. The overall project budget is \$10.1 million, with construction costs of \$8.2 million. Design work has been led by Stantec, an engineering and design firm in St. Paul. Phase 1 will develop approximately 28 acres and include a main entrance, cortege assembly area, administration building, maintenance facility, roads, assembly area, committal shelter, pre-placed crypts, cremation burial areas, columbarium, landscaping and a memorial walk. The donated land was a community effort by Fillmore County and the City of Preston.

“To honor our Veterans in this way means everything to us, and it is an especially fitting honor to donate this beautiful land on the river,” said Fillmore County Commissioner Chuck Amunrud. “I want to thank our Veteran Service

Organizations, citizens and Veterans for their support and for helping us along with this project.”

The cemetery is scheduled to open in 2015. Minnesota’s other State Veterans Cemetery, located in Little Falls, continues to receive local and national accolades. In 2012 approval ratings exceeded 97 percent for the handling of burials, overall appearance of grounds and availability and courtesy of staff. The Minnesota State Veterans Cemetery in Little Falls was also selected as a winner of the prestigious federal Excellence of Appearance Award from the National Cemetery Administration. This award is one of the highest honors a state cemetery can receive from the Federal VA. Minnesota is currently one of only three states in the country to be recognized and receive this award.

The addition of this State Veterans Cemetery in Minnesota is part of a nationwide campaign by the National Cemetery Administration to provide burial within 75 miles of a Veteran’s home. The closest VA national cemetery to this site in Preston is Fort Snelling National Cemetery in Minneapolis, Minn., which is approximately 120 miles away. The closest state cemetery is Northern Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Spooner, Wis., which is approximately 193 miles away.

Burial at a State Veterans Cemetery is open to all Veterans discharged from active military service under conditions other than dishonorable. Their spouses, minor children, and under certain conditions, unmarried adult children, are also eligible for burial. Eligible spouses may be buried, even if they predecease the Veteran. Also eligible for burial are members of the reserve components of the Armed Forces, the National Guard, and the Reserve Officer Training Corps who die while on active duty for training or performing service or who have 20 years of service in reserve components of the Armed Forces creditable for retired pay.

For more information on Minnesota’s State Veterans Cemeteries visit www.MinnesotaVeteran.org.

Walz Legislation to Give Military Retirees the Honor they Deserve Passes House

Washington, DC [10/28/13] – Today, Representative Tim Walz (D-MN), the highest ranking enlisted soldier to ever serve in Congress and co-chair of the National Guard and Reserve Components Caucus, announced that the *Honor America's Guard-Reserve Retirees Act*, which gives military retirees the honor they deserve, passed the House of Representatives as part of H.R. 1405. Walz's legislation grants full veteran status to members of the guard and reserve components who have served at least 20 years, but have not been called up for active duty.

Despite spending two decades serving our nation and standing ready to be deployed at a moment's notice to anywhere in the world in defense of freedom, under current law these brave men and women cannot legally call themselves veterans.

"These men and women took an oath to defend our nation at any cost and have dedicated their lives in service to our country," said Walz, a Member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee. "Many stood at the ready for decades in defense of our nation and the time is now to give them the honor and recognition they have earned and deserve. I am pleased this legislation has passed the House and am optimistic it will finally become law this year."

The House passed Walz's legislation last Congress only to see it blocked in the Senate due to unwarranted concerns about cost. The CBO scored the bill as "cost neutral" and military retirees who would fall under the bills jurisdiction would receive no extra benefits besides being legally recognized as veterans for their two or more decades of service to our country.

The bill enjoys bipartisan support in Congress and also from veterans' organizations, including The Military Coalition which is a group of 34 military, veterans, and uniformed services organizations that has over 5.5 million members nationwide.

"I am pleased this bill passed the House today and remain hopeful for its passage in the Senate. Representative Walz's bill is strongly endorsed by The Military Coalition and we thank him for taking the leadership in pushing for passage of this legislation," said Marshall Hanson of The Military Coalition. "The men and women who have served in uniform for 20 or more years as Guard or Reserve members

should be recognized as military veterans, but are being overlooked by our government. This legislation corrects this injustice, at no cost to taxpayers."

TRICARE and the New Health Care Law

The new health care law is the Affordable Care Act. Simply speaking, the Affordable Care Act will have very little impact on TRICARE beneficiaries. Beneficiaries who receive TRICARE benefits at no cost, by electing to pay an enrollment fee, or by paying monthly premiums have minimum essential coverage required under the Affordable Care Act. The biggest change they will notice may be an extra letter in their mailbox every January, and an extra box to check on their tax forms every April. Beginning with the 2014 tax season, and every tax year after that, the Department of Defense will send every TRICARE beneficiary the same information it sends the Internal Revenue Service. Because the information sent to the IRS is generated using beneficiaries' Social Security numbers, it is essential for sponsors to make sure their family's Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System, or DEERS, information is correct and up-to-date.