



March 4, 2009

GOLD STAR LICENSE PLATES

Since the unveiling on January 2, sixty-two Gold Star Parents have ordered the new Gold Star Parent license plates. Plates are available to all Gold Star Parents at the same price as a regular Washington license plate.

Gold Star Parents should request a certification letter from WDVA by following the instructions at: <http://www.dva.wa.gov/GoldStarParentLicensePlates.html>

AGENCY BUDGET UPDATE

On February 18, the Legislature passed and Governor signed two bills, [HB 1694](#) and [SB 5460](#), with the goal of reducing state spending to address the shortfalls in our state budget.

For WDVA, HB 1694 means that the savings assumed over the last few months by the Office of Financial Management from the freezes on travel, hiring, purchasing and contracting were taken from our agency's 2007-2009 budget. The steps we took in November and December with reductions in staff and other agency savings are helping us balance the budget.

SB 5460 has been called the 'belt-tightening bill' and puts into law a number of freezes aimed at saving money. The basic provisions of the bill are:

- No salary or wage increases for exempt and Washington Management Service positions until Feb. 18, 2010.
- From Feb. 18, 2009 through June 30, 2009, all agencies are prohibited from:
 - filling new or vacant positions and creating new positions;
 - entering into new personal services agreements or contracts or contract amendments that increase costs;
 - purchasing equipment costing more than \$5,000; and
 - authorizing out-of-state travel or training.

There are exemptions to the hiring freeze for staff providing direct patient care at our State Veterans Homes. There are also limited exemptions for contracts, purchases and travel.

The Legislature is now writing the budget for the 2009-2011 biennium. I am working, along with other members of the executive team, to answer questions of State Legislators and staff members as they struggle to write a balanced budget. While we understand that there are limited resources and incredibly difficult decisions that must be made by our elected officials, we

are committed to doing everything we can to maintain our budget and continue providing veterans and their families the care and services they need.

I will continue providing these updates as information becomes available on the 09-11 budget.

CEMETERY UPDATE

A Groundbreaking Ceremony will take place on Memorial Day, May 25 on the grounds of the State Veterans Cemetery in Medical Lake. A formal invitation to all veterans and community members, including the ceremony time and program details, will be available on the cemetery website in the coming weeks.

http://www.dva.wa.gov/eastern_wa_vet_cemetery.html

I am very pleased to report that our cemetery construction project reached a major milestone in February. The Federal VA provided the go-ahead to begin the design and construction phase! Lead contractor, JGM, is working hard to have construction bid documents available in May with bid opening scheduled for mid-June. Our goal will be to move this project forward as quickly as possible, but rest assured we will take the necessary time to ensure that our first State Veterans Cemetery is a place of honor for our veterans.

MEDICARE A –

SERVING VETERANS AFTER HOSPITALIZATION

Our State Veterans Homes have always tailored programs and services based on the needs of our veterans community. For veterans needing care following a hospital stay, our Homes now provide Medicare rehabilitative care.

In order to ensure we have beds available for Medicare eligible veterans, we have designated beds at all three homes to serve Medicare residents.

Our admissions team works closely with hospital discharge planners to quickly process a shortened application.

Veterans will benefit by having the ability to use Medicare for their short term stay and may also get a 'preview' of the facility should they need long-term care in the future. Call 1-877-VETS-R-US or visit the State Veterans Homes online at:

http://www.dva.wa.gov/washington_state_veterans_homes.html