

NEW TAX RELIEF ACT ASSISTS SERVICE MEMBERS AND FAMILIES

Legislation signed by President Bush increases the death gratuity payment to \$12,000 and provides that the full payment is tax-free.

"That portion of the Military Family Tax Relief of 2003 is retroactive to 10 Sept. 2001, to provide for service members who died in the terrorist attacks the following day and in the ongoing Global War on Terror," said Army LCOL Janet Fenton, Director, Armed Forces Tax Council.

"If you are killed on active duty, regardless of whether you're in theater, or in a training accident, or die from disease, your family receives \$12,000 death gratuity that is not taxed," she added. "And that's a big change. In addition, any future increases to the death gratuity will remain tax-free."

"The death gratuity has been \$6,000 since 1991, with half of it being taxed," said the Director. "It just didn't seem to be fair for the military family who was left grieving for their service member to get hit with a tax bill," she added.

SENATE LEGISLATION TARGETS PHONY CASUALTY OFFICERS

Legislation making it a crime to play a hoax on military families by pretending to be a military casualty officer has been introduced in the Senate.

Sponsored by Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC), the Military Family Hoax Prevention Act is aimed at stopping a cruel prank in which someone pretending to be a military official has called families to notify them of casualties or deaths that have not really occurred.

Sen. Orrin G. Hatch (R-Utah), a co-sponsor of the bill and Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said he was aware of the prank, but was surprised to learn that current federal laws governing false impersonation of a government official do not cover the hoax.

Under the bill, S 1445, impersonating an officer or a military employee by calling a family to harass, alarm, shock, or terrify them would be a federal crime. The penalty for being found guilty would be a fine and a prison term of up to five years.

"This bill would punish those who derive some perverted pleasure from terrorizing family members who intensely wait to hear from their loved ones serving in the military abroad," Sen. Hatch said.

PRESIDENT BUSH PRAISES NATION'S RESERVE AND GUARD FORCES

Reserve forces are "serving on every front in the War on Terror," and the nation's resolve in that war cannot be shaken by "murderers and gangsters," President Bush said in a speech at Pease Air National Guard Base, NH.

The President cited the sacrifice, uncertainty, and separation that Reserve Component members must endure.

"Your lives can be changed in a moment with the sudden call to duty," he said. "I want to thank you for your willingness to heed that important call."

President Bush also acknowledged the families of Guard and Reserve forces. "I want to thank your sons, daughters, your husbands and wives, who share in your sacrifice – who are willing to sacrifice for our country and stand behind you," he said.

PRESIDENT EXTOLS IMPORTANCE OF EMPLOYER SUPPORT FOR RESERVE

The importance of employers in making their employees' military service possible was emphasized by President Bush when he signed a proclamation marking National Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve Week.

"In times of need, our nation counts on the Guard and Reserve members to fulfill their commitments of service," President Bush said during a White House ceremony. "We value their courage, and we honor their sacrifices. They're defending their nation in the War on Terror, and they are serving in a just cause."

The President said that Reserve Component service members depend on the understanding of their employers for their service. "Across America where units have been activated, employers at offices, factories, schools, hospitals, and other workplaces have been understanding and really supportive," he said. "They have priority to the needs of our nation."

President Bush said most employers have shown great consideration for their workers. "These companies have the gratitude of our nation; they have the gratitude of the commander in chief," he said.

EDUCATIONAL WEB SITE FOR KIDS ESTABLISHED BY VETERANS AFFAIRS

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has launched "VA Kids," a new Web page designed to help young people understand what it means to be a veteran.

The site contains areas for students in kindergarten through grade 5, for grades 6 through 12, and for teachers.

VA Kids, also, has information about VA, Veterans Day, scholarships, student volunteer opportunities, rehabilitative and special events for disabled veterans and links to veteran-related sites.

See Military.com's special "Veterans Page" for more information.

FORE AND AFT:

Gordon H. Mansfield has been named Deputy Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs. He has been serving in various VA posts since 2001 and earlier served as Executive Director of the Paralyzed Veterans of America The Navy plans to disestablish the signalman rating over the course of the next year September 30 marked the end of another successful recruiting year for the Navy, and the 26th consecutive month that the sea service's recruiting force attained its national mission goals for accessions and new contracts

Military.com has launched "America's Military Discounts Center," a free, on-line directory of savings on goods and services available exclusively to members of the Armed Forces, their families, and veterans. The directory is available at <www.military.com/discount>. ⚡

