

Christopher: 265,000 veterans now have hope

Contributed by Donna Christopher
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Not too long ago I submitted an article regarding the veterans means testing that kept many veterans such as myself from being eligible for health care through the Veterans Administration (VA). The denials came in the form of not meeting the geographic means test (GMT). In my case, if I lived closer to San Francisco I would have been eligible. Because I live in Lake County I was not. I am still hearing from fellow veterans about their denials of care because of the GMT. One had in 26.5 years of service, 2 and a half years active and 24 years in the reserves, and was denied! Good news, folks – the Department of Veterans Affairs announced on Jan. 12 that come this July they will reopen enrollment to those of us known as Priority 8 enrollees. So tie the knot and hang on! “We’re pleased to be able to offer what has been called ‘the best care anywhere’ to many more new veterans,” said current Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. “We’ll be able to provide these newly enrolled veterans with the kind of timely, high quality health care veterans who already use our system are accustomed to.” Peake went on to explain that the VA’s computer systems are being upgraded to accommodate these upcoming changes and that they are working very hard to make sure that Congress, veterans service organizations and the general public are aware of these upcoming changes.

Anyone who has attempted to navigate the current VA Web site finds this to be very good news.

Peake went on to say, “The rule will take effect by June 30, 2009, if the regulatory process proceeds smoothly. We look forward to welcoming these newly eligible veterans into the VA system. VA will continue to monitor wait times to ensure the quality of care is not adversely affected.” Enrollment priorities in the VA were established by Congress in 1996 requiring the VA to annually determine and assess veterans demands for service, determine if the necessary resources were available and that quality, timely care was available to all enrollees. During the Bush administration it was determined that the VA was not able to provide Category 8 enrollees with timely access to health care so the solution was to deny these enrollees care. In Lake County the local Veterans Service office is located in Lakeport at the Old Courthouse Square. The phone number is 263-2384.

Donna Christopher lives in Lucerne. She is a veteran, as was her late father, and her sons currently are serving in the military.

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