

Law reforms VA benefits programs

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has a veterans' benefits bill that makes major changes in VA's education, dependency and indemnity compensation programs.

The Veterans' Benefits Act of 1992 recently signed by the President, standardizes the DIC payment to surviving spouses of Veterans whose service-connected deaths occur on or after Jan. 1, 1993, by eliminating the current schedule of benefits which had been based on the military rank of the deceased veteran. Effective Jan. 1, 1993, a monthly base rate of \$750 will be payable to the surviving spouses of all such veterans. That rate would be increased by \$165 per month if the veteran was totally disabled due to service-connected disabilities continuously for at least 8 years prior to death. Surviving spouses of veterans who died before Jan. 1, 1993, will receive the higher of either the new rate or the benefit under the old schedule.

A number of changes were made in the Montgomery GI Bill and other education programs. Basic educational assistance rates under the Montgomery GI Bill-Active Duty program are increased to \$400 per month for full-time participants who initially serve 3 years or more on active duty; \$325 per month for those who serve two years of active duty; and \$190 per month for full-time participants in the Montgomery GI Bill-Selected Reserve program. The rate increases are effective April 1, 1993.

For vocational rehabilitation benefits (Chapter 31), subsistence allowances will be increased 10 percent. The temporary program of trial work periods and vocational rehabilitation for certain veterans with total disability ratings is made permanent, and the temporary program of vocational training for certain pension recipients is made voluntary and extended through Dec. 31, 1995.

The Veterans' Readjustment Appointments authority for all

veterans of the Vietnam Era has been reinstated until Dec. 31, 1995, or 10 years from date of discharge.

Other provisions include:

- An increase in the additional DIC payment to eligible surviving spouses with dependent children from the current rate of \$71 per month for each child to \$100 per month, begin-

ning in 1993; to \$150 in fiscal year 1994; and \$200 for each child thereafter.

- The death benefit to survivors of Montgomery GI Bill participants who die of a service-connected disability is extended to death occurring within one year of the veteran's discharge from active duty.

- Educational assistance is

authorized for solo flying hours for the remainder of the current temporary program under which veterans can use benefits for flight training.

- The three-year protection of VA health-care eligibility for veterans who lost their pension due to employment is made permanent.