

Veterans Corner
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By: Robert G. Mitchell

VA Claim Processing Goals

Admiral Daniel Cooper, VA Undersecretary for Benefits and head of the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), has directed that all claims for benefits from Veterans who have served in Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom (OIF/OEF) will be given higher processing priority. In a memo sent to all VA Regional Offices Cooper said, "Effective immediately, the processing of claims received from all OEF/OIF veterans will be a priority for VBA. This effort will supplement our previous initiative of providing case management for all seriously injured OIF/OEF veterans. While not every OIF/OEF claim will be case managed, these claims will be given first priority by VBA employees. These young men and women have recently returned from the combat zone and it is vital that we enter them into the VA system as soon as possible." Secretary Cooper's efforts to endure our returning troops are given this priority are commendable.

VA Backlog is 'Out of Control'

VA handled fewer claims and rendered fewer decisions than it anticipated last year, according to its annual accountability report submitted to Congress and the President last November. VFW believes its proof that VA's claims processing system is severely flawed.

"The fact that fewer claims than expected were actually completed is a symptom of a VA claims process that is broke because it added to an out-of-control backlog," said Bill Bradshaw, VFW's Director of National Veterans Service. "Couple that with a claim adjudication error rate of 15% and the six-month average wait to get a claim processed and you have a system that is failing veterans."

Bradshaw noted that VA's claims backlog of 825,846 in mid-December 2006 was more than 55,000 higher than the backlog in December 2005. of that number, he says 600,473 were new compensation and pension claims, 70,326 were for education and 155,047 were on appeal.

In 2006, VA received 806,382 claims, some 11% fewer than projected, and rendered decisions on 774,378, or about *% fewer than it hoped.

Revised "Keep our Promise to America's Military Retirees Act" Re-Introduced

Representatives Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Chet Edwards (D-TX), Jeff Miller (R-FL) and Walter Jones (R-NC) have introduced two bills in Congress – a revised version of the Keep our Promise to America's Military Retirees Act (HR 1222) and a new bill, the Keeping Faith with the greatest Generation Military Retirees Act (HR 1223).

The approach splits the previous legislation in an effort to make each more palatable to Congress. HR 1222 proposes opening the Federal Health Benefit Plan to all military retirees and HR 1223 would waive payment of Medicare Part B for those military retirees who entered the service prior to December 7, 1956.

Navy Reunion

USS PCEC 873 is having their reunion in Saratoga Springs October 1-3, 2007. All Navy Veterans are welcome even if you did not serve on board her. For more information call Jim Morrisey at 518-584-4220.

Coming Events

The Saratoga County Board of Supervisors are sponsoring a Flag Day Re-Dedication ceremony at 1:00pm on June 14, 2007.

The program will take place at the Saratoga County War Memorial located at the Saratoga National Cemetery in Stillwater, NY.

This is open to the public and refreshments will be served.