

VBA has 481,751 claims will take over 1 year

Leading Democrats like to hold up the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) as an example of how well government can provide health care. But veterans who deal with the complex federal bureaucracy have invented an unhappy refrain to describe the VBA: "Deny, deny until you die." VBA, the branch of the Department of Veterans Affairs that dispenses aid and assistance to veterans and their families, is overwhelmed. It reported on Dec. 28 that there are 481,751 pending claims, some of which will take more than a year to be processed. Among those flooding the VBA's facilities with claims are retirement-aged Vietnam veterans and elderly World War II veterans, middle-aged Gulf War veterans, and younger Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. All of these groups are applying in larger numbers because of the weak economy, said Larry Scott, the founder of the advocacy group VAwatchdog.org. An audit released 3 SEP by the inspector general of Veterans Affairs found that 3% of all claims took more than a year for the VBA to process.

A separate audit released Sept. 28 investigating VBA's control of veterans' claims folders, said that 437,000 claims - more than 10% of the 4.2 million on file - had been lost or misplaced.

Co-pay delayed, *from page 1*

nonservice-related medical issues. "We need time to determine whether an increase might pose a significant financial hardship for certain veterans and, if so, what alternative approach would be appropriate relief for these veterans," the statement says.

Created in 2002, the copayment cap began as a \$2 fee for a



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30-day prescription but increased to \$7 in 2008 and to \$8 in 2009. Under VA rules, the drug copayment is supposed to increase each 1 JAN based on the increase in the prescription drug portion of the Medical Consumer Price Index, a measurement maintained by the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics. The drug index, known as CPO-P, called for an automatic \$1 increase that can be delayed under current law but still has to take effect at some point. VA officials called their action a "temporary freeze," with the expectation that the increase will take effect this summer unless a new way of calculating and applying the copayment is found.

In a third report, released Sept 30, the inspector general said employees at VA regional offices had shredded claims forms containing information needed to obtain benefits. Although the inspector general was unable to determine how many claims had been wrongly destroyed, the investigation found claims placed in shred bins, waiting to be destroyed, at 41 VBA locations nationwide.

The VA did provide information to The Washington Times attributable to a "VA spokesman," saying it hired an additional 4,200 people over the past three years to help reduce claims-processing times and is testing a number of pilot programs to streamline the process. The VA also has put new controls in place to prevent workers from shredding needed documents.

Any improvement will come too late to help Greg Hasler, who filed a disability claim with Veterans Affairs in May 2008 after being diagnosed with a severe form of internal cancer. His oncologist recognized it as a kind of cancer commonly caused by radiation and said it likely was caused by Mr. Hasler's service in the early 1960s in Operation Dominic at Christmas Island, a Pacific Ocean atoll where many nuclear tests were conducted. Mr. Hasler died Feb. 4, 2009 at age 66.



February 1, 2010 — National Freedom Day

February 2, 2010 — Groundhog Day

February 2, 2010 — VVA-391 Board of Directors meeting, Veterans Memorial Hall, Washington Street, Sonora, 7 p.m.

February 9, 2010 — General Meeting, Veterans Hall, Washington Street, Sonora. Pot Luck and General Meeting, 6 p.m. at the Sonora Veterans Hall. A-I bring a main dish, J-R brings a dessert, S-Z brings a salad. Bring enough for 6-8 people. Bring a prospective member to dinner. Meeting at 7 p.m. We need to get some member applications filled out and sent in. You can find them on this web site. Bring in a new member this month. Call Dick Southern for more info (928-3848) or email him at Southern@Lodelink.com.

February 12, 2010 — Lincoln's B'day | Operation Homecoming begins

February 14, 1991 — Valentine's Day

February 15, 2010 — President's Day

February 17, 1973 — Ash Wednesday | Continental Navy puts to sea for first time (1776)

February 23, 1945 — Marines raise the American Flag on Mt. Suribachi

February 24, 1991 — Desert Storm Ground Campaign begins.