

# Years-old backlog of VA claims remains

The Obama administration has made a priority of transitioning the Veterans Affairs Department into the new millennium, but a years-old backlog of claims remains. VA Secretary Eric Shinseki noted earlier this month that the department completed 974,000 claims last year but still received approximately 1 million new claims during the same period. The situation became even more complicated last Aug. with the influx of education claims for the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill. Research by Veterans for Common Sense estimates the number of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans will total 600,000 by Sept. 2010. The current claims backlog could discourage a new generation of veterans from seeking care, fears Brian Hawthorne, legislative spokesman for Student Veterans of America. Shinseki has promised to “break the back of the backlog this year,” setting up pilot programs across the country to test the most successful procedures from different regional offices. But there’s no one silver bullet that will create efficiency in all the bureaucracy’s hospitals, clinics, nursing homes and rehabilitation centers. NationalJournal.com consulted different government officials and veterans groups about solutions to tackle the backlog and make the massive medical bureaucracy more accessible. They suggested the following eight ways to fix the VA claims backlog:

- 1) Rely On IRS-Style Auditing System.
- 2) Computerize Records - Computerization is a widely accepted solution to tackle the VA’s mountains of paper claims,

but it’s proved difficult to actually implement such a system. Roger Baker, the VA’s assistant secretary for information and technology, was charged last year with overseeing the creation of software to process education claims for the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill. He has expressed confidence in large-scale automation and software projects such as the Veterans Benefits Management System to improve work flow, calling them “the long-term solution” to the department’s delays. But Paul Sullivan, spokesman for Veterans for Common Sense, testified before the House Committee of Veterans Affairs in Feb. that the plan was an insufficient “update of previous failed computerization attempts” and lobbied for more comprehensive computerization planning. Hawthorne said the VA needs to completely stop taking paper claims and be forced to rely on and improve its computer processing.

3) Improve Coordination With The Defense Department - House Veterans’ Affairs Committee member John Hall (D-NY) said the Defense Department has historically been too turf-conscious to effectively coordinate with the VA. “Seamless transition from active duty to veterans’ status has not happened because of Defense Department’s reluctance to overlap personnel to handle veterans’ matters,” Hall said. “Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Secretary Shinseki have a closer relationship than their previous counterparts, and I’m hopeful they’ll share more information as we go forward.” The Subcommittee on Disability Assistance, which Hall chairs, held a hearing in FEB to review

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The California State Council held a meeting in Fresno which also included the AVVA. Elayne Mackey, state president, and Carol Southern, Region 9 director and Nina Schloffel, president of Chapter 391 AVVA presided over their meeting. The CSC Convention is scheduled for June 2-6 at the Holiday Inn in Fresno. (Photo by Dick Southern)

**Vietnam Veterans of America**

**VVA OMELETTE  
SUNDAY BREAKFAST**

**7:00 — 11:00 a.m.**

**THIRD SUNDAY OF EACH MONTH**

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