Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States
48th Annual Conference

Paul Lawrence, Ph.D.,
Under Secretary for Benefits
August 5, 2019
Thank you!

CSM (RET) Karen Craig
President

CSM Dean Kennebeck
Vice president

Frank Yoakum
Executive Director

And….to everyone in attendance this morning.
Who am I

• Army Veteran, raised in an Army family
• Economist by training
• 30 years of relevant experience for the job, working closely with federal leaders as a senior management consultant
• Focus areas:
  − Efficiency and effectiveness
  − Financial management
  − Improving performance
  − Management challenges
  − Leveraging technology to drive efficiencies
  − Driving change
  − Research & thought leadership on government management

• Why did I take this job?
Agenda

- VA News
- VBA Priorities
- VBA Update
- Issues Update
- Connect with Us
VA Secretary Wilkie:

“Biggest transformation of VA since General Bradley’s time!”
News from the VA

1. Accountability
2. Mission Act
3. Electronic Health Record
4. GI Bill Modernization
5. Appeals Modernization
Accountability

Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act of 2017

A landmark legislation that makes it possible to expedite the removal of habitual non-performers.
MISSION ACT

Significance

• Puts Veterans at the center of health care
• Gives flexible access

Features

• Strengthens VA’s ability to recruit and retain clinicians
• Expands eligibility for caregiver services to all eras of Veterans
• Creates ability for VA to match infrastructure to Veteran needs
• Establishes a VA Center for Innovation for Care & Payment
• Establishes access to urgent care in the community

What it is not: “PRIVATIZATION”
Electronic Health Records

“Not my father’s 800 page health record”

Significance
• VA will have one electronic health record shared across VA/DOD
• This is a big deal

Features
• Consolidated record with DoD, streamlining our exchange of information
• Will drive consistent business practices across VA – a feature of high-reliability organizations
• Resource-based scheduling will improve wait times, Veteran satisfaction and reduce scheduling errors
• Expected to take up to 10 years to fully implement
The mission of the **Veterans Benefits Administration** is to serve as a leading advocate for service members, Veterans, their families and survivors, delivering benefits and services that honor their service, assist in their readjustment, enhance their lives, and engender their full trust.

**23,938 Employees**

- **56% Veterans**

**540** Intake sites, out-based facilities, Vetsuccess on campus sites, and VR&E offices

**56** Regional offices

**39** Other special processing and call centers

**$28B** in benefits distributed in FY19 Q3
“To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan.”

-A. Lincoln
VBA Priorities

- Provide Veterans with the benefits they have earned in a manner that honors their service
- Ensure we are strong fiscal stewards of the money entrusted to us
- Foster a culture of collaboration
Independence Day Veterans Claims Challenge

GOAL
When: May 6-June 30, 2019
What: Complete significantly more claims in this period than ever before
Reward: One day time-off grant for Friday, July 5th

RESULTS
Completed 269,430 claims, ahead of the target of 255,000

NOTES
VBA maintained a high level of quality
Non-rating work was unaffected
Appeals Modernization Act

Successfully Implemented on February 19, 2019

• On Time
The **modernized decision review** process is a place for Veterans and other claimants who disagree with VA’s decision on their claim. This applies to decisions made on or after February 19, 2019. Claimants have a choice of three review lanes (**Supplemental Claim, Higher-Level Review, or Appeal to the “Board” of Veterans Appeals**).

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**Two VBA Decision Lanes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Supplemental Claim</th>
<th>Higher-Level Review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Target (Average Days)</strong></td>
<td>125</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Days to Complete</strong></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Claims Received</strong></td>
<td>45,600*</td>
<td>9,436*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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* Since February 19th 2019

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To learn more about **Appeals Modernization**, visit the following link:  
**Forever GI Bill**

**Forever:** Lifetime benefit for Veterans discharged after January 1, 2013
- Does away with 15-year limit for Veterans discharged after Jan. 1, 2013

**Restoration:** Since passage, VA has notified over 9,500 Veterans affected by school closures and restored over 15,000 months of entitlement so they can get back to school

Servicemembers who were awarded a **Purple Heart** on or after September 11, 2001 entitled to benefits at the 100-percent benefit level for up to 36 months.

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**New & Expanded Benefits**

**Veteran Employment Through Technology (VET TEC)** is designed to give Veterans an edge in the high tech job market

**STEM Education**
- Up to 9 extra months of benefits (not exceeding $30,000) if you meet the criteria
- Funds intended to enable students to finish STEM degree or seek a teaching certificate for a STEM field

For issues or concerns, call **1-888-GI-BILL**
The **Education** program advances the education and skills of Veterans, service members, family members, and survivors through a number of different programs, including the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

### POST-9/11 GI BILL RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FY19 Q3</th>
<th>Target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>437,053</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dollars Paid</td>
<td>$2.1B</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeliness of Processing Original Applications</td>
<td>23.3 days</td>
<td>28 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For issues or concerns, call **1-888-GI-BILL1**
Housing Allowance

1. Spring 2020 – New housing allowance
2. Fall 2019 – Extensive communication
3. True-up
4. Will not collect over payments
Home Loan Guaranty Update

Conforming Loan Limit
• Removes the maximum guarantee loan limit
• Eliminates down payment requirements for high-cost home loans – no cap

Native American Direct Loans
• Removes the current $80,000 loan limit

Purple Heart
• Exempts Purple Heart recipients from paying a loan fee

For more information, visit the link below:
www.benefits.va.gov/homeloans/

Army Veteran recipient
24 millionth VA home
Home Loan Funding Fee Refund Initiative

- Veterans who received a retroactive rating for a service-connected disability with an effective date prior to their home loan closing are potentially due a refund of the funding fee.

- Veterans receiving a refund will be notified by mail and will receive their refund by direct deposit.

- **Projected completion date:** September 30, 2019

Call 877-827-3702 or visit the site below for more information:
https://www.benefits.va.gov/homeloans/purchaseco_loan_fee.asp
Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019

*Public Law 116-23*

- Effective January 1, 2020
- Presumption of herbicide exposure to Veterans 12 miles offshore of Vietnam
- Spina bifida benefits to children of Veterans who served in Thailand
- Retroactive effective date for previously denied claims

What Are We Doing?

- Compiling ship information to make the review process faster
- Obtaining details of final legal rulings & preparing to launch extensive communications outreach to Veterans
- Sec. Wilkie has stayed decisions until the law is effective
- Working to ensure we have proper resources in place to meet the needs of Blue Water Veteran community and minimize the impact on Veterans filing for disability compensation
Can I submit my own evidence?

- Veterans are always encouraged to submit any evidence that is new and relevant to their claims for VA benefits.
- While VA is continuing to work with the Department of Defense to gather records pertaining to military service (e.g. deck logs, etc.), VA will accept records that Veterans may have in their possession as well.

Will BWN claims be expedited?

- VA will prioritize processing of BWN claims for:
  – Veterans with terminal illnesses
  – Veterans who are homeless or facing imminent homelessness
  – Veterans facing serious financial hardship
  – Veterans over age 85 or with life-threatening illnesses will have priority in claims processing.

We urge you to file a claim
Offer
The Offer

• **Background:** National Guard Service Members have unique challenges related to their benefits.

• **Mutual Challenge:** To identify and address the challenges that impact the ability to receive benefits they have earned.

• **Offer:** The VBA VSO Liaison will work with the EANGUS leadership to establish a working group.

• **End State:** Identify the top 5 issues with developed courses of action and brief the results of this working group at the next EANGUS Conference (if not sooner).
Request
Constant cadence of only bad news stories leads to distrust.
Did you know?

VHA – largest integrated medical system in the U.S.
  • 9 million Health Care enrollees
  • Doctors in Residence (training) – 123 K

VBA – more than $100 billion in benefits efficiently administered

NCA – record-breaking customer service

VA researchers developed the nicotine patch in 1984
What Others Are Saying

• Partnership for Public Service: VA is one of the best places to work

• Dartmouth Report: VA healthcare is as good, or better, than any care

• The Journal of the American Medical Association: wait times at VA hospitals are now shorter than private sector.

• Service to Citizens Awards: 11 VA leaders and staff recognized
Connect with us NOW!

@VAVetBenefits  @VABenefits  @VAVetBenefits  @VeteransBenefits
Quarterly webcasts are posted at: benefits.va.gov/stakeholder

For VA customer service, call: 1-800-827-1000

More about VA Benefits: benefits.va.gov

More specific questions? Visit: Inquiry Routing & Information System (IRIS)
VBA continually seeks to hire qualified talent to support our Veterans.

### CURRENT JOB OPENINGS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VA POSITIONS</th>
<th>RELATED EXPERIENCE/INTEREST</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Veterans Service Representative</td>
<td>Claims Processor (medical benefits), Medical Coders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating Veterans Service Representative</td>
<td>Claims Processor, Claims Examiner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans Claims Examiner (Education)</td>
<td>Claims Processor, Education Counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Administrative Specialist (Contact Representative)</td>
<td>Benefits Specialist, Benefits Representative (Call Center)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claims Assistant</td>
<td>Admin Support, Admin Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocation Rehabilitation Counselor</td>
<td>Counselor, Therapist, Social Worker</td>
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Learn more about our current opportunities at:

- [https://www.vacareers.va.gov/](https://www.vacareers.va.gov/)
- [https://www.usajobs.gov/](https://www.usajobs.gov/)
- [https://www.fedshirevets.gov/job-seekers/](https://www.fedshirevets.gov/job-seekers/)

“A Great Place to Work!”

“To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan.”

Abraham Lincoln