

## **RESPONSE TO 60 MINUTES STORY ON VA DISABILITY CLAIMS**

*"Secretary Shinseki believes no Veteran should experience an adversarial relationship with VA. VA's primary mission is to be an advocate for Veterans. The Secretary is deeply committed to changing the paradigm of today's paper-bound disability claims process and believes that the entire system must become more transparent."*

- VA fully shares Veterans' concerns about the timeliness of disability benefit claims processing.
- VA's primary mission is to be an advocate for Veterans. There is a family member, husband, wife, son and daughter behind every Veteran that uses VA benefits and we must never take that responsibility lightly.
- Every day our 298,000 employees care for those who have borne the battle. No Veteran should experience an adversarial relationship with VA – it is unacceptable. But in instances where we have not done right by a Veteran, we must learn from our mistakes and make sure to prevent them from ever happening again.
- One of Secretary Shinseki's top priorities is to create an environment of advocacy for Veterans that is people-centric and forward thinking. We must help Veterans through our processes and make sure that our benefits programs are meeting their needs on a case by case basis.
- Technology is the key to transforming the department's system and processes. VA has embarked on a series of initiatives to improve claims processing nationwide. VA's goal is to convert to a paperless claims process over the next several years.
- VA has over 11,470 employees working to support compensation and pension claims processing. Our staff has grown by 4,200 people in the last three years and we are working diligently to leverage network automation and software productivity tools to manage our caseload effectively and deliver benefits quickly.
- VA needs a benefit rating system that reflects the current needs of our Nation's Veterans and anticipates the needs of our future Veterans. We may not know the specifics of future conflicts, but we must be prepared to provide the best serves they deserve and have earned.
- VA is a large agency—the second largest cabinet-level agency in the federal government. We do have several communications challenges, but we must continue to work hard to improve our lines of communication and provide employees, Veterans, and all of our stakeholders with timely and accurate information.