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VA'S RESPONSE TO 60 MINUTES SEGMENT ON CLAIMS, SORT OF

"Secretary Shinseki believes no Veteran should experience an adversarial relationship with VA."

by Larry Scott, VA Watchdog dot Org

Sunday night, 60 MINUTES did a segment on the Veterans' Benefits Administration (VBA) titled, "Delay, Deny and Hope that I Die."

The video version of the segment is here ...

<http://www.vawatchdog.org/10/nf10/nfjan10/nf010410-5.htm>

And, the print version is here ...

<http://www.vawatchdog.org/10/nf10/nfjan10/nf010410-4.htm>

Just before the segment aired, the VA sent out an email to many Veterans' Service Organizations and their Service Officers hoping to preempt some of the bad news that was about to be aired. That article is here ...

<http://www.vawatchdog.org/10/nf10/nfjan10/nf010410-3.htm>

From the above article:

Kevin Secor, the VA's Veterans' Service Organizations Liaison,
sent out the following email:

*From: Secor, Kevin
To: (redacted ... list included most VSOs)
Subject: 60 Minutes*

Good afternoon Gentlemen,

As many are aware of, 60 Minutes tonight will air a segment on VBA and issues surrounding claims processing tonight. You also know there are always two sides to the story and HIPPA will

prevent me from going any further. We also know some will take tonight's story and expand it for their own benefit. You know along with VA there have been issues surrounding claims processing and that there are issues that need to be resolved to better serve our Veterans. We have worked with you on these issues and will continue to do so. I wanted you to have the attached information so you know what VA is doing concerning claims processing to better serve our Veterans.

At the time we published that information, we did not have the attachments to the email.

Now we do ... and there are four.

It should be noted that the VA prepared these document BEFORE the 60 MINUTES broadcast when they had absolutely no idea what the segment would contain ... so they guessed and prepared extremely generic documents.

The first document is a statement and talking points (complete with incorrect spelling ... note the word that is supposed to be "disability" in the title of the document) ... [and it is available for viewing or download here](#) ... the text appears below:

**RESPONSE TO 60 MINUTES STORY ON VA DISABILITY CLAIMS
STATEMENT + TALKING POINTS – JANUARY 3, 2010:**

“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 Veteran's 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.*

Other documents are:

VA Claims Processing, Question and Answer ... [available for viewing or download here.](#)

Fact Sheet on Improving Claims Processing and Reducing Inventory ... [available for viewing or download here.](#)

And, Talking Points on Information Technology Modernization and Paperless Processing ... [available for viewing or download here.](#)

These are all things we've heard before. There is nothing new here. "OK, folks, break it up, move on, move on ... there's nothing to see here."

If the VA really had their act together, they would have watched the segment and immediately issued a press release responding to the specific points made in the program. But, instead, it's smoke and mirrors ... and more games.

Printed from: <http://www.vawatchdog.org/10/nf10/nfjan10/nf010510-3.htm>