



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

February 4, 2010

The Honorable Wally Herger
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Herger:

This is in response to your cosigned letter concerning the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) processing of Post-9/11 GI Bill claims. I apologize for the delay in responding.

In a coordinated effort to speed up the processing of Post-9/11 GI Bill education benefits this spring, VA reached out to student Veterans, servicemembers, and university officials to assist the agency in meeting an aggressive goal of processing, by February 1, all enrollment certifications received by January 19, 2010.

VA achieved its goal of on-time payment of the February 1 housing allowance for all Veterans whose spring enrollments were received by January 19. VA has to date paid 131,630 Veterans and servicemembers for the spring term. We have approximately 30,000 spring enrollments pending that were received since January 19 or are for terms beginning in later months. Through January 28, VA has issued nearly \$1.75 billion in Post-9/11 GI Bill benefit payments to 193,853 individuals and their educational institutions for both the fall and spring terms. In January, VA received an average of 22,000 enrollments per week and processed 38,500 per week.

VA sent letters to university presidents and school certifying officials, State Veterans Affairs Directors, Veteran Service Organizations, select members of Congress, and other stakeholders highlighting VA's goal and emphasizing the importance of submitting school enrollment information as soon as possible. We also released a "Hip Pocket" guide and checklist, with helpful tips to assist Veterans in the application process. The guide and checklist can be found on the GI Bill Web site, www.GIBILL.VA.gov.

We are working diligently to ensure Veterans receive education benefits in a timely manner. Over the past several months, VA instituted numerous streamlining procedures to improve processing timeliness. To handle a late semester surge in certificates of enrollment in December and prevent carryover of a fall semester backlog into the spring semester, Education Call Center employees were temporarily diverted to augment claims processing tasks on the two lowest call days each week. VA also mandated at least 24 hours of overtime per month for regular claims processing staff at

Page 2

The Honorable Wally Herger

the four regional processing offices. In late October, VA awarded a contract to Affiliated Computer Services Federal Solutions, LLC to provide temporary assistance in processing supplemental claims for non-Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. This allowed VA to dedicate additional VA employees to processing more complex Post-9/11 GI Bill claims.

VA continues to evaluate current staffing and business processes and make modifications wherever possible to facilitate timely processing of claims. Additionally, this year VA will deploy more robust automated tools it has been aggressively developing to increase claims processing efficiency.

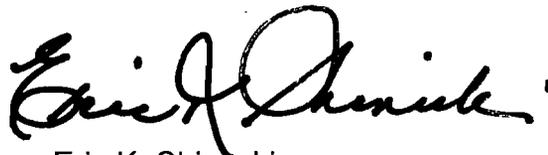
Providing adequate customer service to Veterans and schools is a high priority. Our primary outreach tool is www.GIBILL.VA.gov. This Web site provides detailed information about all education benefit programs, a benefit comparison tool, and responses to frequently asked questions regarding education benefits. VA also provides news updates and information on its Post-9/11 GI Bill Facebook page. Finally, VA continues to send letters to Veterans and other stakeholders, providing details on individual claims, status updates on claims processing, and other relevant benefit information.

VA will ensure that individuals, who requested advance payments from a VA regional office or through the designated VA Web site, remain informed about how and when their benefit payments will be adjusted to account for the advance payment. In the interim, Veterans will receive their regular benefit payments, but will be notified in advance of steps to recoup funds paid out through the advance payment initiative.

I appreciate the opportunity to address your concerns regarding this matter. A similar letter was sent to the other signers of the letter.

Thank you for your continuing support of our Nation's Veterans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric K. Shinseki". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "E" and "S".

Eric K. Shinseki