

Chairman Daniel K. Akaka

Hearing on State-of-Art IT Solutions for VA Benefits Delivery  
March 25, 2009

Aloha and welcome to today's hearing. This morning we hope to learn more about VA's use of information technology to improve the delivery of benefits to veterans. VA has invested significant resources over the years in developing IT solutions to modernize how it does business. Unfortunately, the return on our investment has been mixed. This Committee has held a number of hearings on a variety of IT subjects, and stepped up oversight of VA IT initiatives.

The current Administration has made it a priority, embracing new technology to improve the delivery of benefits. This, along with VA's move to reorganize IT, gives me hope that we will finally see significant improvements.

One focus this morning is the use of IT in VA's implementation of the Post- 9/11 GI Bill. Failure simply is not option with this program. When VA flips the switch on August 1, 2009 to implement the new Post-9/11 GI Bill, all manual and IT systems must be in place and properly functioning so that eligible recipients get their checks on time.

At last month's budget hearing, Secretary Shinseki identified eight high-risk areas related to the implementation of the new program. I want to learn more about VA's efforts to address those problems.

The Committee would also benefit from hearing about VA's other IT initiatives, including paperless processing and the use of rules-based technology for more consistent and timely adjudication of claims.

We have done a great deal of work on disability compensation. However, timely and accurate processing of disability claims remains a problem. Hiring and training more claims adjudicators is important, but this will only take us so far. The Department must continue to work toward improving the claims adjudication process.

The results of VA's Claims Processing Improvement Study support the Administration's commitment to improve the delivery of benefits through investing in better technology. I look forward to hearing about the details of VBA's Paperless Delivery of Benefits Initiative and how it will improve services for veterans.

The processes we are looking at this morning are complex and the solutions are equally as complicated. IT can be a part of the solution, but it is not an end in itself.

I again welcome everyone to today's hearing and look forward to hearing the testimony of our witnesses.

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