



## PRESS RELEASE

Vietnam Veterans of America

---

**IMMEDIATE  
RELEASE**

**August 27, 2015**

**No. 15-21**

**Contact:  
Mokie Porter  
301-585-4000, Ext. 146**

### **Initial VA Claims Backlog Reduced; Errors and Appeals on the Rise**

(Washington, D.C.)—Vietnam Veterans of America recognizes that the Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Benefits Administration has reduced the backlog of veterans' benefits claims. "However," said John Rowan, National President of Vietnam Veterans of America, "we assert this reduction came at a loss of accuracy."

"This is evident by the fact that the claims appeals backlog has skyrocketed by 22 percent to over 307,700 appeals in the past three years. Furthermore, eighty percent of our cases brought before the Board of Veterans Appeals are won outright or returned to the Veterans Benefits Administration to be corrected. As a result, the veteran can wait for over five years for an accurate decision. To address the appeals backlog, it is imperative that the VA hire additional Decision Review Officers whose exclusive duties are to resolve appealed rating decisions at the VA's Regional Benefits Offices," said Rowan.

"Clearly, the pressure put on the VA claims raters to complete claims within the current 125-day standard has increased the VA's error rate, resulting in more veterans appealing their claims decisions than ever before," noted Rowan. This error rate has been confirmed by recent VA IG reports. As a result, the backlog has shifted from the claims process to the appeals process. More veterans are now trapped in the archaic and broken appeals system, facing a five-year wait to have their claims accurately adjudicated and their appeal resolved at the Board of Veterans Appeals.

Additionally, the VA has a policy that limits veterans organizations' service officers to a 16-business-hour window in which to sign off on rating decisions. When an error is discovered in the draft rating decision, the service officer's only recourse is to contact the rater's coach. And if the rater's coach doesn't get back to the service officer within the 16-business-hour time limit so that the error can be corrected, it is too late to resolve the error informally. "It is wrong to penalize veterans because a rater's coach does not respond to the service officer within the VA's defined time limit. Service officers ought to be able to 'stop the clock' in those instances so that appeals can be prevented," said Rowan.

"Simply deciding an initial claim faster and shifting veterans over to a broken appeals process isn't the

answer. Veterans deserve an accurate decision, first time up, and if necessary, a fair, accurate, and timely resolution at the lowest level possible,” said Rowan.

*Vietnam Veterans of America is the nation's only congressionally chartered veterans' service organization dedicated to the needs of Vietnam-era veterans and their families. VVA's founding principle is "Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another."*