



Obama's Talk On Veterans Is Just That

Despite His Promises And Rosy Claims, Obama's VA Is Still Struggling To Produce Results For Veterans

In August 2013, Obama Promised Not To Let Up Until The VA Backlog Was Eliminated "Once And For All." OBAMA: "And we're not going to let up until we eliminate the backlog once and for all. And we'll keep moving ahead with paperless systems so the backlog doesn't come back, and so your claims are processed right -- the first time, on time. After years of military service, you shouldn't have to wait for years for the benefits you have earned." (President Obama, [Remarks](#), Orlando, FL, 8/10/13)

- **During His 2014 State Of The Union Speech, Obama Again Promised To Slash The Backlog.** OBAMA: "No one knows this better than those who serve in uniform. As this time of war draws to a close, a new generation of heroes returns to civilian life. We'll keep slashing that backlog so our veterans receive the benefits they've earned, and our wounded warriors receive the health care -- including the mental health care -- that they need." (President Obama, [State Of The Union Address](#), Washington, DC, 1/28/14)

National Journal's Ron Fournier, On The VA: "Emblematic Of Obama's Inattention To The Hard Work Of Governing." "The launch of the Affordable Care Act and the worsening of conditions at the Veterans Affairs Department are emblematic of Obama's inattention to the hard work of governing. He is slow to fire poor-serving Cabinet members and quick to dismiss controversies as "phony scandals." To the Obama administration, transparency is a mere talking point." (Ron Fournier, "How Obama Became The Superhero Of Excuses," [National Journal](#), 5/21/14)

OBAMA HAS MADE SWEEPING CLAIMS ABOUT IMPROVING THE VA'S BUREAUCRACY, BUT REALITY HASN'T MATCHED HIS RHETORIC

Obama And His Administration Have Said There Is A Plan In Place To End The Backlog...

In 2010, Obama Said "We're Hiring Thousands Of New Claims Processors To Break The Backlog Once And For All." OBAMA: "We're hiring thousands of new claims processors to break the backlog once and for all. And to make sure the backlog doesn't come back, we're reforming the claims process itself with new information technologies and a paperless system." (President Barack Obama, [Remarks At The Disabled Veterans Of America Conference](#), Atlanta, GA, 8/2/10)

Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki: "We Have A Fix For This, We're Open For Business, And We Will End The Backlog In 2015." "Asked if Shinseki was 'satisfied' with his performance over the past five years at the helm of the VA, the secretary responded: 'No veteran should have to wait for claims

as they are today. We have a fix for this, we're open for business, and we will end the backlog in 2015.” (Molly K. Hopper, “VA Chief Shinseki Vows Backlog In Veterans Claims Will End By 2015,” [The Hill](#), 3/24/13)

...But Hundreds Of Thousands Of Veterans Are Still Waiting

NBC News Headline: “VA Backlog Again Gnarled In Red Tape, Report Shows.” (Bill Briggs, “VA Backlog Again Gnarled In Red Tape, Report Shows,” [NBC News](#), 2/3/14)

In 2013, The Center For Investigative Reporting Found That The VA’s “Ability To Quickly Provide Service-Related Benefits Has Virtually Collapsed Under President Barack Obama.” “The Department of Veterans Affairs has failed to provide key information to Congress and the public that shows the agency’s ability to quickly provide service-related benefits has virtually collapsed under President Barack Obama.” (Aaron Glantz, “VA’s Ability To Quickly Provide Benefits Plummets Under Obama,” [Center For Investigative Reporting](#), 3/11/13)

The Department Of Veterans Affairs Had 572,002 Compensation And Pension Claims Pending As Of May 26, 2014. ([U.S. Department Of Veterans Affairs](#), Accessed 5/27/14)

291,740 Pending Claims Are In The VA’s Backlog, Waiting Over 125 Days. ([U.S. Department Of Veterans Affairs](#), Accessed 5/27/14)

- **The Number Of Claims In The VA’s Backlog Has Nearly Doubled From The 158,290 Claims When The 125 Backlog Metric Was First Used On October 3, 2009.** ([U.S. Department Of Veterans Affairs](#), Accessed 5/12/14)

The Percentage Of Pending Claims In The Backlog Has Jumped From 35.6 Percent When The New Metric Was Introduced To 51 Percent As Of May 26, 2014. ([U.S. Department Of Veterans Affairs](#), Accessed 5/12/14)

- **The Average Claim At The VA Goes Into The Backlog, Spending 160.1 Days Pending.** ([U.S. Department Of Veterans Affairs](#), Accessed 5/27/14)

In The Current Fiscal Year, An Average 242.9 Days Is Needed To Complete Pension And Compensation Claims At The VA. ([U.S. Department Of Veterans Affairs](#), Accessed 5/27/14)

- **A 2013 Report Revealed That Veterans Filing Their First Claims Were Waiting Between 316 And 327 Days For Their Claims To Be Processed.** “Internal VA documents, obtained by the Center for Investigative Reporting and authenticated by the agency, reveal that delays newly returning veterans face before receiving disability compensation and other benefits are far longer than the agency has publicly acknowledged. The documents also offer insight into some of the reasons for those delays. The agency tracks and widely reports the average wait time: 273 days. But the internal data indicates that veterans filing their first claim, including those who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, wait nearly two months longer, between 316 and 327 days.” (Aaron Glantz, “VA’s Ability To Quickly Provide Benefits Plummets Under Obama,” [Center For Investigative Reporting](#), 3/11/13)

In 2013, The New York Times Editorial Board Decried “The Grim Backlog At Veterans Affairs.” “A new report based on previously unreleased data from the Department of Veterans Affairs paints a distressing portrait of an agency buried helplessly in paperwork — with a claims backlog that has gotten far worse in the past four years. The average wait to begin receiving disability compensation and other benefits is 273 days, and up to 327 days for veterans making claims for the first time. Those in big cities wait far longer — up to 642 days in New York.” (Editorial, “The Grim Backlog At Veterans Affairs,” [The New York Times](#), 3/11/13)

A 2013 Report Highlighted The Contrast Between The Obama Administration’s “Optimistic Reports” And The “Dismal” Reality Of The Status Quo. “The oddness of the agency’s situation —

optimistic reports of progress contrasted with dismal snapshots of the status quo — will surely be addressed in a hearing in the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs on Wednesday. The under secretary for benefits, Allison Hickey, will be there, we hope, to add clarity to the unsettling picture." (Editorial, "The Grim Backlog At Veterans Affairs," [The New York Times](#), 3/11/13)

- **The Claims Backlog In One Office Was So Severe That The Files' Weight "Appeared To Have The Potential To Compromise The Integrity Of The Building."** "His article includes a map showing the scale of the problem and a stunning photo from a report last August by the agency's inspector general about an office in Winston-Salem, N.C., that was so deluged with claims folders that they 'appeared to have the potential to compromise the integrity of the building.'" (Editorial, "The Grim Backlog At Veterans Affairs," [The New York Times](#), 3/11/13)

And While Veterans Wait, Some VA Managers Have Pocketed Large Bonuses

A July 2013 Report From The GAO Found That The VA Was Unable To Confirm Whether \$150 Million In Performance Bonuses Given Out To Providers Actually Awarded Performance. "In fiscal year 2011, about 80 percent of VHA's nearly 22,500 providers received approximately \$150 million in performance pay, and about 20 percent received more than \$10 million in performance awards. GAO was asked to review VHA's performance pay and award systems... Moreover, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has not reviewed the goals set by medical centers and networks and therefore does not have reasonable assurance that the goals make a clear link between performance pay and providers' performance." ("VA Health Care: Action Needed To Improve Administration of The Provider Performance Pay And Award System," [Government Accountability Office](#), July 2013)

- **A VA Social Worker In Chicago Claimed Employees Created Secret Waiting Lists To "Make Numbers Look Better For Their Own Recognition And For Bonuses."** "Germaine Clarno is a VA social worker and employee representative in Chicago. She alleges there are multiple secret waiting lists of veterans kept at the Hines VA Medical Center... Clarno says the purpose of the lists was 'to make numbers look better for their own recognition and for bonuses.'" (Wyatt Andrews, "VA Bonuses Were Incentive To Hide Wait Times, Whistleblowers Say," [CBS](#), 5/13/14)
- **A Scheduler At The New Hampshire VA Testified In 2012 That Employees Would Submit False Reports On Wait Times To Trigger Bonuses For Executives.** "A scheduler at the New Hampshire VA testified to that effect in 2012 before a Senate subcommittee, saying that employees there submitted false reports of wait times for veterans to help reach performance goals that triggered bonuses for executives." (Jacob Siegel, "Did The VA Pay Out Bonuses For Screwing Veterans?," [The Daily Beast](#), 5/12/14)

According To Reports, \$8.7 Million In Bonuses Were Given To Seven "Troubled" VA Facilities In The Last Three Years, With Employees At The Now Infamous Phoenix VA Receiving \$843,000.

"OpenTheBooks.com, a website created to monitor federal spending and hold government officials accountable, reported Wednesday on millions of dollars in bonus payments during 2011-13 to employees of seven VA health-care centers linked with allegations of wait-time fraud. The report said Phoenix VA workers received \$843,000. 'With 12,549 bonuses totaling over \$8.7 million at the seven troubled VA facilities during the last three years, executives must answer as to why every veteran didn't receive world-class health care,' said Adam Andrzejewski, the site's founder." (Dennis Wagner, "Phoenix VA Chief's Bonus Rescinded Amid Controversy," [USA Today](#), 5/22/14)

The Former Top Official Of The Atlanta VA Center Received \$65,000 In Bonuses Even As Audits "Revealed Lengthy Wait Times For Mental Health Care And Mismanagement That Led To Three Deaths." "The former top administrator at the Atlanta VA Medical Center received \$65,000 in

performance bonuses over a four-year span as internal audits revealed lengthy wait times for mental health care and mismanagement that led to three deaths.” (Daniel Malloy, “Atlanta VA Exec Scored Bonuses While Audits Found Lapses,” [The Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#), 4/26/14)

“Thomas Lastowka, Director Of The VA’s Philadelphia Regional Office, Got The Same \$23,091 Bump In 2011 Even Though The Backlog Of Claims At His Office Doubled Between 2010 And 2011.” (Aaron Glantz, “VA Rewarded Top Officials With Bonuses, Despite Growing Claims Backlog,” [The Center For Investigative Reporting](#), 4/26/13)

OBAMA SAID IMPROVING VETERAN ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES WAS A PRIORITY, BUT ISN’T ABLE TO MEET HIS OWN GOALS

In August 2012, Obama Signed An Executive Order Aiming To Improve Veteran Access To Mental Health Services. “Today, President Obama will sign an Executive Order directing key federal departments to expand suicide prevention strategies and take steps to meet the current and future demand for mental health and substance abuse treatment services for veterans, service members, and their families.” (White House, “President Obama Signs Executive Order To Improve Access To Mental Health Services For Veterans, Service Members, And Military Families,” [Fact Sheet](#), 8/31/12)

Obama Hasn’t Been Able To Prevent Long Waits, Failed Scheduling, And Lax Work Standards

USA Today Headline: “Many Veterans Still Wait Weeks For Mental Health Care” (Gregg Zoroya And Meghan Hoyer, “Many Veterans Still Wait Weeks For Mental Health Care,” [USA Today](#), 11/4/13)

“Obama’s Goals For Timely Mental-Health Treatment Are Not Being Met.” “For veterans who have access to the system, Obama’s goals for timely mental-health treatment are not being met. An investigation by the VA’s inspector-general in April found that more than half of veterans who needed comprehensive mental-health evaluations had not received them within two weeks of initial contact, the VA’s target. That contradicted the VA’s annual report to Congress last year, which said 95 percent of first-time patients received a full mental-health evaluation within 14 days.” (Phil Stewart, “Special Report: Obama’s Struggle To Mend Veterans’ Safety Net,” [Reuters](#), 7/26/12)

- **KMOX Headline: “Whistleblower Claims Veterans Wait A Month Or More For Mental Health Care”** (Kevin Killeen, “Whistleblower Claims Veterans Wait A Month Or More For Mental Health Care,” [KMOX](#), 5/14/14)

Thousands Of Veterans Seeking Mental Health Services For The First Time Are Waiting Beyond The Agency’s Goal Of Treatment Within Two Weeks. “Thousands of veterans seeking help for the first time for mental health problems are waiting longer than the government’s goal of counseling them within two weeks, Department of Veterans Affairs data show.” (Gregg Zoroya And Meghan Hoyer, “Many Veterans Still Wait Weeks For Mental Health Care,” [USA Today](#), 11/4/13)

In 2013, The Veterans Affairs Agency “Failed To Schedule A Third Of New Mental Health Patient Appointments Within 14 Days.” “At a time when an estimated 22 veterans commit suicide daily, the agency in 2013 failed to schedule a third of new mental health patient appointments within 14 days, the data show.” (Gregg Zoroya And Meghan Hoyer, “Many Veterans Still Wait Weeks For Mental Health Care,” [USA Today](#), 11/4/13)

- **“In Nearly Half Of 47,700 First-Time Psychiatric Therapy Appointments In 2013, Veterans Waited Longer Than Two Weeks...”** “In nearly half of 47,700 first-time psychiatric therapy appointments in 2013, veterans waited longer than two weeks, records show. The average time it took to start any type of behavioral health therapy was 15 days.” (Gregg Zoroya And Meghan Hoyer, “Many Veterans Still Wait Weeks For Mental Health Care,” [USA Today](#), 11/4/13)

“Veterans Seeking Help For Mental Health Problems Are Being Told To Wait—Sometimes A Month

Or More—Before Seeing A Psychiatrist At The VA Medical Center In St. Louis.” (Kevin Killeen, “Whistleblower Claims Veterans Wait A Month Or More For Mental Health Care,” [KMOX](#), 5/14/14)

Dr. Jose Mathews, The Former Chief Of Psychiatry At The VA In St. Louis, Says Psychiatrists Are Only Seeing About Six Patients Per Day “When They Could Easily See A Dozen A Day.” “The former chief of psychiatry at the VA here, Dr. Jose Mathews, claims VA psychiatrists are only seeing about six patients a day when they could easily see a dozen a day.” (Kevin Killeen, “Whistleblower Claims Veterans Wait A Month Or More For Mental Health Care,” [KMOX](#), 5/14/14)

- **Dr. Mathews: “You’re Talking About People Who, In Many Cases, Have Very Severe Mental Illness And Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.”** ““You’re talking about people who, in many cases, have very severe mental illness and post-traumatic stress disorder,’ he says. ‘They range in age from young veterans to people from Vietnam and before.”” (Kevin Killeen, “Whistleblower Claims Veterans Wait A Month Or More For Mental Health Care,” [KMOX](#), 5/14/14)