

From: [Public Relations Division](#)
Subject: Shutdown halts VA's efforts to go paperless
Date: Thursday, October 10, 2013 5:02:48 AM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Shutdown halts VA's efforts to go paperless

WASHINGTON (Oct. 9, 2013) -- The Department of Veterans Affairs progress toward a paperless records system was halted Oct. 8 when the partial federal government shutdown stopped all software development by the department. The latest negative impact on the nation's veterans prompted a strong response from American Legion National Commander Daniel Dellinger.

On Oct. 8, VA was forced to furlough more than 2,700 information technology employees, bringing a cessation of software development and halting VA's progress toward implementing its paperless Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS). Contractors no longer are allowed to develop any software patches to correct malfunctions within VA's electronic programs, which are new and have been subject to constant adjustments to make them efficient and effective.

"This is just one more example of veterans being short-changed because of the inability of Congress and the White House to do what's best for our country: reach an agreement and end the shutdown," Dellinger said. "VBMS is one of the keys to reducing the benefits claims backlog that has some veterans waiting years for benefits they earned through service to their country. The progress being made in the effort has come to a grinding halt because of this impasse. Once again, this country's veterans are caught in the middle between squabbling politicians."

The furloughing of IT employees also impacted the Stakeholders Enterprise Portal, which is software that allows veterans service officers to submit VA claims through a paperless system, reducing claims processing times; and the E-Benefits portal, which allows veterans to submit electronic claims to VA while choosing a veterans service organization to represent them.

The halting of VA's electronic efforts come at the same time that the department closed public access to all of its regional offices while furloughing more than 7,000 additional employees, which has slowed the filing of claims for veterans using veterans service officers.

VA had reduced its pending claims from 900,000 to 725,000 from January 2013 to September, but since the shutdown went into effect, 2,000 claims have been added to the backlog.

"By no means was the claims backlog solved, but it was headed in the right direction prior to the partial federal shutdown," Dellinger said. "Now we're back to adding to it, through no fault of anyone but the politicians who refuse to compromise. America's veterans, who already have sacrificed so much, are being asked to do so again. How is that fair?"

-30-

Contacts: Marty Callaghan: 202-263-5758/202-215-8644, mcallaghan@legion.org or Craig Roberts: 202-263-2982/202-406-0887, croberts@legion.org. A high resolution photo of Nat. Cmdr. Dellinger is available at www.legion.org.

===== MORE BELOW

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Legion commends vet-friendly colleges for suspending fees during shutdown

WASHINGTON (Oct. 9, 2013) -- The leader of the nation's largest veterans service organization is praising a handful of schools who are suspending tuition fees for active-duty servicemember students supported by Department of Defense's Military Tuition Assistance (TA) while the current government shutdown continues.

"The generosity of these institutions of higher learning is commendable and wise," said Daniel M. Dellinger, national commander of The American Legion. "Obviously, these schools' administrators understand and appreciate the sacrifices already being made by our servicemembers and their families. To compound those difficulties by introducing the financial strain of unpaid tuition, or by threatening the continuation of their Military Tuition Assistance-supported students' academic studies, would be unfortunate, indeed. I am heartened by the actions of the schools who are obviously cognizant of the quality of these students and the promise of their post graduation contributions to our nation."

Northeastern University in Boston, Columbia College in Columbia, Mo., and National University in San Diego are among the schools announcing tuition payment suspensions for military students.

This past weekend, Northeastern University assured the more than 100 active-duty men and women currently enrolled as students there that the university would provide whatever financial assistance was needed to prevent a disruption in their education. University President Joseph E. Aoun reportedly wrote a letter to Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel urging a reversal of DoD's decision to halt the processing of TA program applications in light of the government shutdown.

In announcing Columbia College's military-friendly tuition policy, Mike Lederle – assistant dean for military and federal programs – said, "This is an opportunity to create some consistency and stability for our military students. We value the contributions of our servicemember students, and we want to continue to help them during this time of uncertainty."

Similarly, National University President Dr. Michael Cunningham said, "We are not going to allow a government shutdown to adversely impact the academic pursuits of our active-duty military students. Our nation has a shortage of citizens with four-year and advanced degrees. To maintain our position in the global economy we must continue to ensure those who want to pursue a degree have the opportunity to do so – especially those who have served our country so honorably."

-30-

Contacts: Marty Callaghan: 202-263-5758/202-215-8644, mcallaghan@legion.org or Craig Roberts: 202-263-2982/202-406-0887, croberts@legion.org. A high resolution photo of Nat. Cmdr. Dellinger is available at www.legion.org.

THE AMERICAN LEGION

War-time veterans and military members dedicated to a strong national security; compassionate care for veterans and their families; community service; and the wholesome development of our nation's youth.
Legion.org - [Facebook](#) - [Twitter](#) - [YouTube](#)

THE AMERICAN LEGION

War-time veterans and military members dedicated to a strong national security; compassionate care for veterans and their families; community service; and the wholesome development of our nation's youth.
Legion.org - [Facebook](#) - [Twitter](#) - [YouTube](#)

