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## Student Veterans: Tell Your Side

*February 5, 2013 by Alex Horton*



As the population of student Veterans continues to grow at hundreds of campuses across the country, so does the need to tell our side of the story. It's an important thing to get right; student Vet graduates are a pool of job seekers, and employers need to see us as dedicated and capable applicants.

This is something you can help affect right now, in two ways. The first is to connect with [American Public Media](#) to share your challenges, experiences, and triumphs as a student with military experience. I hear plenty of folks that suggest journalists can't or won't get it right, so this is an opportunity to correct the record.

The second is to set yourself up for success on campus to make it through graduation in the first place. Georgetown's SVA faculty advisor Barbara Mujica gave a [good rundown](#) on how you can step up to increase resources and visibility of Veterans on campus, with everything from starting a local SVA chapter to establishing lines of communication with administrative offices and faculty.

One thing I'd add: look into opportunities with the Pat Tillman Foundation's [Military Scholars program](#), an elite class of students who are already leading the way. Applications for [this year's class](#) are open through February 15.

If you're unhappy with how student Veterans are portrayed in the media, or how your school administration performs, now's the time to be proactive.

[7 Comments](#)

## Veteran Unemployment Below National Average at 7.0 Percent

*February 1, 2013 by Kate Hoit*

On Friday, the Bureau of Labor Statistics released [Veteran unemployment data for the month of January](#). The unemployment rate for all Veterans was 7.6 percent—a slight increase from last month but still below the national average of 7.9 percent. For Post-9/11 veterans, the rate was 11.7 percent. While Veteran unemployment has ticked up over the past several months, the long-term trend remains downward.

In the first graph, we see the monthly unemployment rate for all Veterans since January 2010. While the uptick in recent months is apparent, the long-term trend shows a clear decrease.

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## Bridging the VA Trust Gap

*January 28, 2013 by Alex Horton*



When I discussed the possibility of employment at VA with my future boss, he asked if I had used VA services myself.

“Just the GI Bill,” I said. “I’m not going to take my chances in a VA hospital.”

I was a couple years out of the Army, still young but not young enough to ignore the ailments resulting from a combat tour as an infantryman. I didn’t have any exposure to the medical care side of VA, and just assumed it wasn’t for me. I simply “heard” from “them” that the care was subpar. And since then, I’ve proven my own misconceptions wrong. Many VA facilities [have ranked](#) among the best hospitals in the country—and I declined excellent federal employee health insurance benefits to utilize VA care exclusively.

I’ve heard similar murmurs from countless Veterans since I’ve been here, and while I understand the skepticism, it’s simply unconstructive and potentially harmful to spread falsehoods and inaccuracies to folks that need help—ranging from common illnesses to surgery and life-long mental health care. Not to mention other services, like home loans and education benefits.

Skepticism formed from second-hand information isn’t beneficial to anyone, and simply put, it doesn’t help your buddy to tell them to stay out of the VA system.

I'll be completely honest: I've had a few frustrating moments with VA medical care over the years, but the good far outweighs the bad. When I go to appointments, I actively look for problems. I usually come away with none (and I don't tell anyone I work for VA). I try to tell both sides to give balance to that monolithic idea of VA that Veterans hold. It can be difficult, as folks tend to conflate problems like the claims backlog to health care and end up avoiding both. But that isn't a solution for anyone.

It's fair to suggest that any tooting of our own horn would be met with skepticism, so that's where third-party validations come into play. Somewhere in the middle of satisfied and unsatisfied Veterans enrolled in VA care are millions of undecided Vets who, for any number of reasons, don't pursue benefits. We need to convince those people to swing by, but we have to end this chronic cynicism of VA.

So this is an open invitation to any Veterans service organization, non-profit, church group, sewing circle, online discussion board, student Veterans group—anyone really—who would like to help correct this chronic issue of mistrust. Drop me a line at [newmedia@va.gov](mailto:newmedia@va.gov) with “VA trust gap” in the subject line, and we'll toss around ideas on how we get folks into the system. I can also help connect you with folks from the benefits, health, and cemetery offices to discuss more specific issues.

It's past the time where we are content with throwing up our hands and ceding large swaths of Veterans because we don't know how to reach them. A lot of that has to do with building trust on our end, but to begin, we have to get a handle on the untruths out there. So let's talk. The line is now open.

[37 Comments](#)

## **New Social Networking Mobile App for Veterans**

*January 24, 2013 by Pooja Virkar*



**(Editor's note: This is an app developed by a third party. VA didn't develop it and does not support or endorse it.)** [POS-REP](#), short for "position report," is a new social networking mobile app that allows Veterans to locate other Veterans, communicate and find resources in their area. The app, currently in the final stages of Apple approval, was developed by Anthony Allman, an Army Veteran, with a five man team.

The inspiration for the mobile app came from the devastating loss of former Marine Clay Hunt, whose depression and PTSD eventually led to his suicide in March of 2011. On [Business Insider](#), Allman explained there were three other Veterans within ten miles of Hunt. After that realization, the idea of an app that connects Veterans with others in their area was born.

The free download has multiple features, including Radar, which shows a map of other nearby Veterans and allows users to broadcast their own locations if they choose. There is also Sitrep, which allows Veterans to post status updates and communicate with one another.

The mobile app's long-term goal is to ease the transition from the military by providing additional support and resources through local connections with others who are experiencing, or have experienced the transition themselves.

Learn more about the POS-REP mobile app on their [Facebook](#) page and [Twitter feed](#).

[22 Comments](#)

# Cutting Verification Red Tape

January 23, 2013 by Alex Horton



There have been a few times I've used VA services when I've asked, "Why do they need this information from me? Isn't it out there somewhere?" This is especially true for anyone who has had to fill out an eligibility verification report to confirm eligibility for benefits—an annual event that put the burden of information on Veterans and drew resources away from VA staff.

Now the red tape is coming off the verification process. [From WBTV:](#)

VA will implement a new process for confirming eligibility for benefits, and staff that had been responsible for processing the old form will instead focus on eliminating the compensation claims backlog.

Historically, beneficiaries have been required to complete an EVR each year to ensure their pension benefits continued.

Under the new initiative, VA will work with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and the Social Security Administration (SSA) to verify continued eligibility for pension benefits.

About 100 VA employees handle those verifications, so now they'll be put to good use by tackling the claims backlog.

Check out VA's benefits page on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and their [home page](#).

[21 Comments](#)

## Intel Report, January 18

*January 18, 2013 by Alex Horton*



Your end of the week wrap-up of Veterans news and resources:

- The National Day of Service is Saturday, January 19, and it's a reminder that any day can be one of service to your nation or community. Check out how you can [volunteer at VA](#) and give back to fellow Veterans.
- VA's Adaptive Sports office released a [new PSA](#) to encourage disabled Vets to refine their mission in life. Check out the spot here and see how it all [came together](#).
- There's a flu bug going around the country, and VA has been working to [contain it](#) at all facilities. Think about getting a flu shot soon.
- It's a new year, and that means a new round of tax returns and filings. You may qualify for a free tax preparation care of the IRS. [See if you qualify](#).
- The fastest way to get VA news and information is from our Facebook and Twitter pages. [Every VA medical center is now on Facebook](#), and new Twitter feeds are going up every week. [Find your facility here](#).

[1 Comment](#)

## **Faster Claims Processing Systems Continue Nationwide Deployment**

*January 14, 2013 by Alex Horton*



Far and away, the biggest concern I hear from Veterans is the disability backlog. From knowing where to start, to the paperwork and appointments—and then the wait for a decision with care and benefits on the line—the whole process can get frustrating.

It's an issue decades in the making, and not one with an easy, quick fix. That's why VA, at the end of last year, implemented a paperless processing systems at 18 regional offices known as the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS), which pilots showed cut decision times in half while increasing accuracy. Now VA is in the process of rolling out VBMS to the remaining 38 regional offices by the end of the year.

From the [release](#):

Critical to VA's transformation is ending the reliance on the outmoded paper-intensive processes which prevent timely and accurate claims processing. VA is deploying technology solutions which improve access, drive automation, reduce variance, and enable faster and more efficient operations to eliminate the backlog.

In other words, the processing system used has not kept up with increased demand, even as VA processes more than 1 million claims each year, and technology is the solution. The backlog grew when barriers to PTSD

compensation [were removed](#), along with the consideration of certain illnesses presumptive of [Agent Orange exposure](#)—and multiple complex injuries from Iraq and Afghanistan added an [unprecedented number of claims](#). But the long term issues stem from yesterday's technology not meeting today's demands. VBMS and other transformation initiatives begin implemented at regional offices across the country aim to take care of that once and for all.

[35 Comments](#)

## Intel report, January 11

January 11, 2013 by Alex Horton



Your end of week roundup of Veterans news and resources:

- Historically, we haven't been great at determining how well student Veterans are performing. That's why VA [teamed up](#) with Student Veterans of America and the National Student Clearinghouse to get a better grip on the graduation rate of student Vets. This will help all of us better understand what we do right, and what we need to improve.

- Despite some challenges, Veterans are leaving the service to continue with successful lives. We profiled 12 of them for our portrait project [Strong at the Broken Places](#)—an effort to show the nation what resiliency looks like. The project is ongoing, so if you'd like to participate, [drop us a line](#).
- Sen. Chuck Hagel, a Vietnam Veteran and former deputy administrator for VA, was [nominated](#) to head the Pentagon as the new Defense chief.
- Veterans are used to adapting to tough situations, working in small teams, and operating in high stress environments. Sounds like a small business doesn't it? [Learn how](#) to create your own business, get information on upcoming conferences, and more.
- Frankly, our old homepage wasn't great. It was ugly, clunky, and confusing. We resigned [VA.gov](#), so check it out if you haven't been in awhile, and leave feedback in the comments. We'll do our best to incorporate ideas.

Comments Off

## Vietnam Vet Sen. Chuck Hagel Nominated for Defense Chief

*January 9, 2013 by Alex Horton*



For those who served in Vietnam, [recent news](#) of Sen. Chuck Hagel's nomination as Secretary of Defense should come as welcomed news. If confirmed, Sen. Hagel would become the first Vietnam Veteran to head the Pentagon. VA Secretary Eric Shinseki, himself a Vietnam Veteran, [congratulated](#) Sen. Hagel on his nomination:

"His lifetime of experience and leadership has prepared him to serve the Nation well as our next Secretary of Defense. I fully support his nomination and look forward to his partnership in meeting the needs of our transitioning Servicemembers, survivors, Veterans and their families."

Sen. Hagel is uniquely qualified, primarily as a former deputy administrator for VA under President Reagan, and as a twice-wounded combat Veteran turned statesman. And as a former enlisted soldier myself, I can't help but admire Sen. Hagel's path to the top, usually reserved for officer types. Sen. Hagel knows where we've been and what we can do, and we certainly look forward to his leadership at the Pentagon.

[12 Comments](#)

## Veteran Unemployment Still Below National Average; Post-9/11 Annual Rate Falls to 9.9

*January 7, 2013 by Lauren Bailey*

On Friday, the Bureau of Labor Statistics released [Veteran unemployment data for the month of December](#). The unemployment rate for all Veterans was 7.0 percent—still below the national average of 7.8 percent. For post-9/11 veterans, the rate was 10.8 percent. Most importantly, the annual jobless rate for post-9/11 Vets was 9.9 percent in 2012; a significant drop from the annual average in 2011 of 12.1 percent.

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- **Guest Posts**



- [Blue Button for America](#)

By [Matthew McCall and Henry Wei](#)

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5 Feb 2013

***Presidential innovation fellows working on Blue Button for America at the Department of Veterans Affairs.***

In August 2010, President Obama announced the Blue Button. Today, it has been downloaded 2.7 million times and the program has been adopted by both the Department of Defense and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

[Read more » 1 Comment](#)

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- [VA Disability Compensation Increases in 2013](#)

By [Samantha O'Neil](#)

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4 Feb 2013

***Communications specialist, Veterans Benefits Administration***

Last month, the more than four million Veterans and survivors who receive compensation benefits from VA saw an increase of 1.7 percent in their total monthly payment.

[Read more » 15 Comments](#)



▪ [Building Renovation to Help Homeless Veterans](#)

By [Donna Beiter](#)

1 Feb 2013

***VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System***

Sixty-five homeless Veterans will have a chance to transition back into society when the renovation of a building is completed at the West Los Angeles VA Medical Center.

[Read more » 6 Comments](#)



▪ [Tell Your Story – Apply to Become a Tillman Military Scholar](#)

By [Ed Woodward](#)

24 Jan 2013

***U.S. Air Force Veteran and 2012 Tillman Military Scholar***

Every member of the military has a story and they are as varied and unique as the individuals who have chosen to serve their country...and this is mine. The Pat Tillman Foundation wants you to tell your story in your own words while they help alleviate some of the financial obstacles that impede your ability to achieve your educational and career goals.

[Read more » 5 Comments](#)



▪ [Keeping in Touch: VBA Conducts Outreach and Collects Feedback](#)

By [Richard Allen Smith](#)

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18 Jan 2013

***U.S. Army Veteran; Communications Specialist, Veterans Benefits Administration***

Representatives from VBA's Benefits Assistance Service (BAS) conduct dozens of outreach activities each year. It's just one of the many ways VBA stays in contact with the Veterans we serve.

[Read more » 13 Comments](#)

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▪ [VA Responding to Flu Outbreak to Protect Veterans](#)

By [Victoria Davey](#)

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16 Jan 2013

***Chief officer of public health, Veterans Health Administration***

VHA is responding vigorously to the nationwide flu outbreak to protect the health of all Veterans and staff in the VA health system.

[Read more » 5 Comments](#)

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▪ [12 Veterans, 3 Bands, One Cause](#)

By [Maureen Bail](#)

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15 Jan 2013

***Program Assistant for Vocational Rehabilitation, Philadelphia RO***

Veterans live with the reality of PTSD every day, and two VA employees found a unique way to help raise awareness and funds for PTSD services.

[Read more » 3 Comments](#)



▪ [Mission ReDefined: Encouraging Vets With Physical Disabilities to Take on Sports](#)

By [Doug Williams](#)

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15 Jan 2013

*Freelance Writer*

The "Mission Redefined" campaign, a joint effort by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and U.S. Paralympics, released a public service announcement on Jan. 15 that features disabled Veteran Johnston sprinting down a track.

[Read more »](#) [2 Comments](#)

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