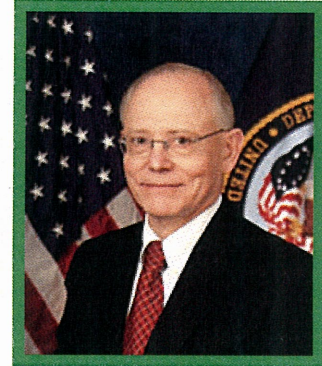




December 19, 2008

To the American People,

I am pleased to provide you with the Department of Veterans Affairs' *Highlights for the Citizen*, a short "user-friendly" summary of the Department's accomplishments, financial position, and management challenges for Fiscal Year 2008.



Medical Services: *Delivering High-Quality Health Care*

- **Patient Access:** 98.7 percent of primary care appointments were scheduled within 30 days of the desired appointment date.
- **Quality of Health Care:** Attained scores of 84 percent and 88 percent for the Clinical Practice Guidelines and Prevention Index, respectively -- nationally recognized industry standards used to measure quality of health care.
- **Rural Health:** Established the Rural Mobile Health Care Clinics pilot project to improve access to primary care and mental health services to serve veterans in 24 predominately rural counties.
- **Suicide Hotline and Suicide Prevention:** Continued to operate a national suicide prevention hotline to provide veterans in emotional crisis with free, 24/7 access to trained counselors.
- **Expanding Polytrauma Treatment Capabilities:** Identified San Antonio, Texas, for the location of a fifth polytrauma center to assist severely injured OEF/OIF veterans.
- **Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI):** VA and the Department of Defense are developing a joint TBI Center of Excellence at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland. When completed, this will be a state-of-the-art facility dedicated to the support and treatment of complications arising from TBI.
- **Other Initiatives:** Initiatives are underway to address serious injuries such as amputations, spinal cord injuries, and blindness.

Benefits: *Ensuring a High Quality of Life After Military Service*

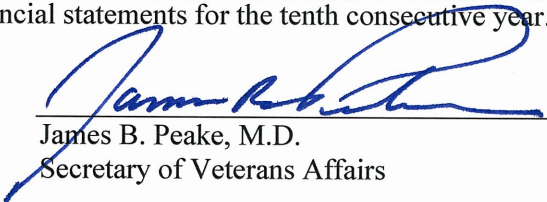
- **Disability Benefits:** Processed nearly 900,000 claims for disability benefits.
- **Disability Exam Pilot Project:** Began a Disability Evaluation pilot in the national capital region wherein the servicemembers undergo a single medical examination to aid in determining benefits.
- **Insurance:** Processed insurance disbursements in an average of 1.6 workdays – significantly better than the industry average of 5.7 workdays.
- **Education:** Provided education benefits to approximately 539,000 students and processed original claims in 19 days – down from 32 days in 2007.

Cemeteries: *Honoring Veterans for Sacrifices on Behalf of the Nation*

- **Veterans Served:** With the opening of four new State veterans cemeteries in Georgia, South Carolina, Iowa, and Kentucky, 84.2 percent of veterans are now served by a burial option within a reasonable distance (75 miles) of their residence.
- **Cemetery Expansion:** Continued progress in establishing six new national cemeteries, which will provide service to approximately 1 million veterans.

Finance: *Ensuring Proper Stewardship of Taxpayer Dollars*

- Obtained an unqualified audit opinion on our financial statements for the tenth consecutive year.


James B. Peake, M.D.
Secretary of Veterans Affairs