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**U.S. House of Representatives**

**COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

364 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

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July 21, 2026

The Honorable Douglas A. Collins  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Thank you to your team for appearing as witnesses before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Subcommittee on Technology Modernization Oversight hearing titled, "PACT Act Implementation: Modernizing VA Disability Claims Through Effective Technology" on July 13, 2026.

As a follow-up to the hearing, I request that Mr. Orifici, Acting Deputy Chief Information Officer of the Office of Information and Technology, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' response to the attached questions for the record.

The Committee requests written responses no later than August 11, 2026, so they may be made part of the record. If you have any questions, please reach out to Mr. Nicholas West, Chief Clerk, on my staff via email at [Nicholas.west@mail.house.gov](mailto:Nicholas.west@mail.house.gov)

Sincerely,



**TOM BARRETT**

Chairman

Subcommittee on Technology Modernization

cc: The Honorable Nikki Budzinski, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Technology Modernization

Enclosure:

Questions for the Record submitted by Chairman Tom Barrett and Ranking Member Nikki Budzinski

**U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Veterans' Affairs**  
**Subcommittee on Technology Modernization**  
**July 13, 2026 Oversight Hearing**  
**PACT Act Implementation: Modernizing VA Disability Claims Through Effective**  
**Technology**  
**Questions from Chairman Barrett**

Mr. Robert Orifici

Q1 How does VBA ensure all benefits-related AI uses (OCR/Smart Search, TERA automation, summarizations, Smart Claim Check, AIM, etc.) are cataloged in OIT's AI Use Case Inventory, risk-rated, and governed—and how is that reconciled against contractor attestations required under VA's Artificial Intelligence in VA Contracts' clause?

Q2. What specific percentage of incoming medical evidence is actually arriving in a machine-readable format today?

Q3. Can you provide examples of how you have measured or plan to measure success for your AI use cases?

Q4. What is the technical barrier preventing the VA from leveraging AI to instantly schedule C&P exams the moment a claim is submitted?

Q5. The Social Security Administration relies on eHealth Exchange to automatically pull millions of medical records in real-time to fast-track their own disability determinations. VA is already the single most active participant in this very exchange. This means VBA could adopt this identical, proven automated model to drastically cut down claim development times without signing new, pricey contracts or paying supplemental fees. Given those massive efficiency gains, why isn't a concrete, TEFCA-driven strategy to eliminate manual medical record collection explicitly integrated as a core milestone in your 5-Year Modernization blueprint?

Mr. Derek Herbert

Q1. How does VBA track appeals related to automation? Have you seen an increase in appeals for the types of claims that tend to be handled more through automation than others?

Q2. We are seeing instances where your technology teams are sprinting ahead to build automated claims tools, but the M21-1 manual's policy update lags behind. If the software logic deciding these claims doesn't perfectly match the written adjudication rules, VA is making legally indefensible decisions. Given how fast your technology is moving, what exactly is VBA doing to

ensure that policy keeps up with the code? Who is the specific official responsible for certifying that a new automation script perfectly aligns with the law before it is released into production?

VBA is spending hundreds of millions of dollars on contracts, such as the Benefits Transformation Platform with IBM, managed directly out of its own business office. Furthermore, the Fiscal Year 2027 budget requests \$130 million specifically for automation and artificial intelligence investments directly for VBA, rather than routing these complex technology acquisitions through central enterprise channels.

Q3A. Please provide a detailed justification explaining how operating parallel technology and acquisition structures within VBA represents an efficient use of taxpayer resources.

Q3B. Does VBA believe that its own internal contracting officers are the most qualified personnel within the Department to procure and oversee highly complex artificial intelligence systems?

Q3D. What is the operational or statutory justification for VBA maintaining its own separate acquisition personnel to administer these technology contracts instead of relying on the enterprise-level technology contracting professionals at OALC?

**Ranking Member Nikki Budzinski**

1. *(Taken for the record in the hearing)* How often does VBMS have system-wide or regional outages? How about individual level crashes? How long do these outages last on average? How does VA measure downtime?
  - a. *(Taken for the record in the hearing)* Please provide the data VA tracks on the system-wide, regional, and individual-level lags and crashes. This data should include the frequency, length, employee impact, and location of these outages (in cases of regional and individual downtime), as well as the reason for such downtime/outages dating back until at least January 2025. Please also include how these outages are tracked (internal monitoring, IT ticket submission, etc). If VA does not track/maintain this data, please share the rationale for not tracking system-wide, regional, and/or individual downtime.
2. In the hearing, Mr. Orifici mentioned that the closure rate for IT/Help Desk tickets is approximately 8 days. Please provide the following information: the number of weekly submissions VA receives (broken down by regional office), broad category breakdown of the types of issues being submitted, trends and big rock issues identified by VBA or OIT as it pertains to tickets on VBMS and ADS functionality and usability, closure rates broken down by regional office, and other metrics that VA tracks in this effort.
  - a. Mr. Herbert also mentioned that there were “several different types of feedback mechanisms to capture when employees run into issues.” What other reporting avenues does VA manage or track for these types of outages, other than IT/Help Desk tickets and the employee feedback tool launched in July 2024?
3. Please provide any guiding policies or documentation given to supervisors for assessing the need for and granting excluded time and adjustments to their quotas in cases of regional and individual level crashes.
  - a. Please provide any guiding policies or documentation given to employees for what processes they must follow for notifying their leadership and OIT staff of system-wide, regional, or individual crashes, as well as how to request excluded time.
  - b. Since January 20, 2025, how often is excluded time granted when requested? Please provide this information broken down by when this time was granted, the cause of why this time was granted (e.g. outages, lags, training, etc.), how many employees received this excluded time, where the excluded time was granted by Regional Office, and what the accommodation was.
  - c. Since January 20, 2025, how often is excluded time rejected when requested?
4. How often does VBA push updates to tools like ADS or the whole VBMS platform? How are employees notified of changes in their workflows?
5. From VA’s viewpoint, is ADS necessary to modernize the claims process?
6. VA’s OIG has found issues with the quality of information produced by certain automated tools used by VBA to process veterans’ claims. How is VA addressing issues

with the quality of information produced by these automated tools and what steps will VA take to ensure AI tools are not producing errors or being misused?

7. An additional issue that we have heard from frontline employees relates to Instructor-led Web Training, or I-W-T. Unless an employee is already working for V-B-A, they are unable to access V-B-M-S until after they complete I-W-T. In reality, this means they aren't able to get real-time looks into their working environment until they're actually in it, and under mandated production quotas. Does VA plan to build a sterile V-B-M-S training environment or sandbox for trainees? If so, when will it be functional and implemented into I-W-T?
8. Has VA evaluated whether increased production expectations have affected the quality and accuracy of claims?
9. What objective quality metrics has VA tracked since implementing its current performance system?

### **Representative Maggie Goodlander**

1. New Compensation Recipients (For Mr. Herbert)
  - o Regarding new recipients into VA's compensation program, how many are coming directly out of active duty? Please provide:
    - The number of veterans who became new recipients of VA disability compensation in FY2025 and FY2026 (to date).
    - Of those new recipients, how many filed within one year of separating from active duty?
  - o Has VA identified opportunities to streamline bureaucratic processes related to disability claims, especially for servicemember transitioning directly from active duty?
  - o What administrative or statutory barriers prevent VA from further streamlining the disability claims process?
2. Claims Processors Workforce Numbers (For Mr. Herbert)
  - o How many claims examiners or processors are currently employed by the VA, who focus on disability compensation? Please provide:
    - Comparable staffing levels as of January 2025 and January 2026.
    - The number of employees hired, separated (broken down by DRP, VERA, or other attrition), or retired since January 2025, by station.
    - The number of currently authorized vacancies for these positions.
3. Digital vs. Paper Claims (For Mr. Herbert)
  - o What are the most common delays, including those related to physical paper records or hard-copy documentation, is VA experiencing through the disability compensation system?
  - o Please provide the percentage of disability compensation claims processed entirely digitally, versus those that involve any physical paper records or hard-copy documentation, during FY2025 and FY2026 (to date).

- o Which portions of the claims process remain dependent on paper records and what steps VA is taking to eliminate those dependencies?