***Veterans Denied Disability If Shutdown Continues***
**News**
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WASHINGTON (AP) â□□ About 3.8 million veterans will not receive disability compensation next month if the partial government shutdown continues into late October, Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki says.

Some 315,000 veterans and 202,000 surviving spouses and dependents will see pension payments stopped.

Shinseki is spelling out some of the dire consequences of a longer-term shutdown in testimony Wednesday for the House Committee on Veterans Affairs. The short-term consequences have meant that disability claims production has slowed by an average of about 1,400 per day since the shutdown began Oct. 1, and that has stalled the department's efforts to reduce the backlog of disability claims pending for longer than 125 days.

In all, more than $6 billion in payments would be halted with an extended shutdown.

"In some areas, like health care delivery, there are fewer adverse effects. In others, such as reducing the claims backlog, we have already seen a negative impact," Shinseki says in written testimony obtained by The Associated Press in advance of the hearing.

The House has passed legislation that would provide veterans disability, pension and other benefits in the event of a prolonged shutdown. But the White House has urged lawmakers not to take a piecemeal approach to continuing government services.

Shinseki plans to make that case as well, saying it's not the best solution for veterans. He'll note that even if the VA were fully funded, some services to veterans would suffer.

His written testimony says the Labor Department has largely shut down its VETS program, which provides employment and counseling services to veterans. The Small Business Administration has closed 10 centers focused on helping veterans create and operate businesses. And the Housing and Urban Development Department is not issuing new vouchers to homeless vets, though those relying on vouchers to pay rent will be able to continue using them.

"Veterans, of course, are affected like other Americans by the government shutdown â□□ more than 600,000 veterans are employed by the federal government, many others work for impacted federal contractors, or work for other businesses that are suffering from the shutdown," Shinseki says.

Veterans groups have largely avoided taking sides in the battle, supporting both the Republican-controlled House's efforts to pass legislation extending funding specifically for certain VA benefits as well as the Democratic-led effort to fund the entire federal government.

Some groups have expressed frustration with what they described as incomplete or inconsistent statements from the VA about the impact.

"These inconsistencies have left veterans confused, concerned and dismayed," says the written

testimony from Alex Nicholson, the legislative director for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America.

Nicholson says his organization has been fielding countless calls and messages from veterans worried about the shutdown's impact.

Shinseki says the VA planned for an orderly shutdown but has confronted "unprecedented legal and programmatic questions" and would do its best to keep lawmakers informed.