

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs today outlined its short-term and long-term plans for distribution of Webb-Mitchell GI Bill benefits at a hearing of the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity.

The VA estimates that 520,000 veterans will apply for benefits under the legislation. To prepare, the VA reported it will be ready to distribute benefits through an interim system on Aug. 1, 2009, and will have a permanent, automated system in place within two years. Benefit distribution will not be outsourced, and will be done entirely by the VA.

“We promised our veterans an education, and I don’t think we should outsource that promise,” said Congressman Harry Mitchell, the lead House sponsor of the New GI Bill. “The only way we can keep our promise is to make sure we demand accountability through the process.”

Mitchell is the chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations.

To facilitate benefits distribution, the VA intends to hire 400 new processors at VA Regional Processing Offices by March 2009. The VA is currently working with the Department of Defense to collect contact information for eligible servicemembers and veterans to make them aware of the benefits they have earned.