



HYUNSOOL EO KIM | THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

U.S. Rep. Glenn Nye, left, meets with Navy Capt. Anthony Califano on Friday as others wait to meet Nye, who spoke at a seminar at Old Dominion University on the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

## GI Bill process can be improved, Nye says

Forum on the new program highlights shortcomings, strides

By Philip Walzer  
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### NORFOLK

The Post-9/11 GI Bill was deployed in the fall to help veterans and their relatives retool for new careers.

Yet some waited months for their federal payments and sank deeper in debt. That's got to change, U.S. Rep. Glenn Nye said Friday.

"The program should be ready to go when the serviceperson is ready to go to college," Nye said at a forum at Old Dominion University about the GI Bill. "It's important that we do an even better job in providing this service."

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, which administers the program, must work harder to expedite payments and overcome other hurdles, such as outdated technology,

Nye said.

Yet a speaker from the Navy said most glitches were the fault not of the government, but of the students or schools. Officials of local colleges said the process has caused relatively few problems and seems to be running more smoothly this semester.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill, championed by Sen. Jim Webb, D-Va., covers all tuition and fees for some recent veterans at public and some private colleges. In some cases, it may be used by a veteran's spouse or child. Recipients might also get stipends for books and housing.

Nye, D-2nd District, said he fielded complaints from 20 constituents, who waited several months for the housing payments.

In a letter Wednesday to U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki, Nye wrote: "Because the program is still not organized, veterans are being forced to apply for student loans and to accrue large

amounts of personal debt as they wait for the funding to become available."

At the forum, Ann Hunter, the Navy's chief of voluntary education, said she believed hundreds of Navy personnel are still awaiting stipends from the fall. In 90 percent of the cases, she said, the problem is that the applicant has not filled out a form properly or a school has not certified the applicant's enrollment.

Hunter advised college officials to "go online to study all of the tools the VA has given you to make this work better." She told students to think twice

about colleges whose counselors have a "deer-in-the-head-lights" reaction to the GI Bill.

Officials at ODU, Tidewater Community College and ECPI College of Technology, which enrolled hundreds of beneficiaries, said in interviews that students were not penalized by the delays.

TCC did not receive some tuition payments until the end of the fall semester, but "we allowed them to be enrolled, knowing the moneys would come in eventually," said Phyllis Milloy, the vice president for finance.

The housing stipends go

directly to students. Andrea Dance, an assistant registrar at ODU, said some students told her that they received those before the university got the tuition payments.

Both said the VA department was processing requests more quickly this year. "Everything was new last semester," Dance said. "This semester they really have made a lot of effort to try to make things better."

The department's Web site said it had processed claims for 141,580 students for the spring, as of Thursday.

A department official had been scheduled to speak, but the storm prevented him from coming, said Lawrence Dotolo, president of the Virginia Tidewater Consortium for Higher Education, the forum's sponsor. A call to the department's media office in Washington was not returned Friday.

For more information, go to [www.gibill.va.gov](http://www.gibill.va.gov).

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U.S. Rep. Glenn Nye on the Post-9/11 GI Bill