



(January 8, 2016)

In order to further improve the lines of communication and to respond to the concerns between the National VA Council and you our members, I have established a National VA Council Briefing. This NVAC Briefing will bring you the latest news and developments within DVA and provide you with the current status of issues this Council is currently addressing. I believe that this NVAC Briefing will greatly enhance the way in which we communicate and the way in which we share new information, keeping you better informed.

Alma L. Lee
National VA Council, President

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**In This Briefing:** [Federal Times: Committee blasts OPM, other agencies for document disclosure](#)  
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The House Oversight Committee called four agencies on the carpet at a Jan. 7 hearing examining the time it takes to process Congressional document requests.

Representatives from the Department of Homeland Security, Department of Justice, Office of Management and Budget and Office of Personnel Management faced repeated, and often heated, questions from committee members over requests for documents from agency investigations that were delayed or hadn't been fulfilled.

"To my fellow members, here's a flashing signal that maybe there's a problem," said committee chair Rep. Jason Chaffetz, R-Utah.

"It's a little trick to say, 'Oh, we've provided a 100,000 of this or 50,000 of that.' Tell me what percentage of the documents we get. Because if we want 100 percent of the truth, we're going to need 100 percent of the documents. And until we get them, it makes us think that you're hiding something."

Chaffetz chastised some agency officials for disclosure delays but seemed to direct most of his ire towards OPM and Jason Levine, the agency's director for Congressional, Legislative, and Intergovernmental Affairs.

The committee chair took issue with redacted document disclosures that OPM provided related to the investigation of this summer's cyber hack.

Chaffetz repeatedly queried Levine on why confidential in camera reports—not disclosed publicly—to Congress on the investigation had redacted information, especially when he said that OPM CIO Donna Seymour told the committee that breach had not impacted the agency's cyber architecture or proprietary information.

"We're mystified as to what's true," he said. "Is it what Ms. Seymour testified or is what you are telling us now, that they did get very sensitive documents? We're not able to have these documents. They were stolen. We know our adversaries have them, but you won't allow Congress to look at them."

Levine said that the documents Chaffetz had referenced were part of five separate requests the committee had made regarding the breach, with OPM redacting only system sensitive information, like user information.

But Chaffetz wasn't having it, again citing Seymour's testimony that sensitive information wasn't exposed and, therefore, the reports should not have been redacted.

"Don't tell us you're happy to [disclose information], because, as a member of Congress with very high security clearances, you won't let us look at these materials," he said.

"We're asking to see this information and this is what you give us in camera. We have to finally negotiate with you over months to get to this point where I can even hold [the unredacted information] up."

It was part of a steady piñata beat of congressmen venting frustration at the agencies for slow document disclosure response matched by pleas from officials that their offices were overwhelmed by committee requests.

"Upon my arrival at DHS, I was surprised to learn of the depth, breadth and quantity of oversight that this department faces," said Tia Johnson, Homeland Security's assistant secretary for legislative affairs.

"At last count, the department answered to 92 congressional committees and subcommittees and 27 other caucuses, commissions and groups."

While some committee members like Chaffetz and ranking member Elijah Cummings, D-Md., did acknowledge the heavy workload of processing requests, they also pointed to several examples requests and follow-up requests going unanswered from the agencies.

"All of the documents we've been requesting through emails, we've been asking for months. When will we get 100 percent of these requests," Chaffetz asked Levine with regards to disclosure and request updates.

"I don't know when you are done [with the requests] this is the problem with all of you." The frustration crossed both sides of the aisle as committee members cited requests they had made that had not received a response. Ultimately, Chaffetz asked each official to promise they would notify members when their agencies completed a request.

“We need transparency. We need to work together,” Chaffetz said. “You have a lot of good staff and a lot of good people. We’re not here to disparage any one person’s reputation, but we are here to get answers”.