



(March 3, 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: Former Director of Phoenix VA Hospital Pleads Guilty**  
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Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
District of Arizona

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, March 2, 2016

PHOENIX – On March 1, 2016, Sharon M. Helman, 45, of Surprise, Ariz., the former director of the Phoenix VA Medical Center, pleaded guilty to making a false financial disclosure to the federal government.

“I commend the FBI and the VA Office of Inspector General for their thorough investigation concerning the VA Medical Center in Phoenix, which revealed that the Center’s director had received, but failed to report, tens of thousands of dollars of gifts from a lobbyist,” stated U.S. Attorney John S. Leonardo. “Based on their thorough investigation, we do not intend to pursue any additional criminal charges at this time.”

“The FBI recognizes and appreciates the tremendous sacrifice and service our veterans have made for our country. With this in mind, we conducted a thorough and extensive investigation of the allegations surrounding the Phoenix VA. Our investigation revealed that the former director of the Phoenix VA Medical Center failed to report gifts as required under federal law,” said FBI Acting Special Agent in Charge Mark Cwynar. “Although this plea agreement calls for a term of probation, making a false financial disclosure to the federal government is a felony and will permanently attach to Ms. Helman’s legacy.”

Michael E. Seitler, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Inspector General, Northwest Field Office, stated: “VA executives have an obligation to clearly disclose any potential conflicts of interest. By providing false information to VA, Ms. Helman concealed her financial relationship with a senior employee of a consulting firm. That firm advised large corporations seeking to expand their VA business. This prosecution holds Ms. Helman accountable. We hope it will deter any other government executives who may be tempted to conceal this type of information.”

Helman was director of the Phoenix VA hospital from February 2012 to December 2014. Federal law required Helman to annually complete and file a financial disclosure report and to disclose, among many other things, gifts received during the applicable calendar year. In her plea agreement, Helman admitted that, in March 2014, she submitted a financial disclosure in which she falsely reported that she received no gifts during 2013. That report was false because during 2013 Helman had, in fact, received gifts totaling more than \$19,300. The gifts included an automobile, a check for \$5,000, concert tickets, and two round-trip airline tickets.

Helman also acknowledged that she filed a false report for 2012, failing to report four gifts of a total value of more than \$2,000. Furthermore, although she did not file a financial disclosure report for 2014, Helman agreed that between January 2 and July 1 of that year, she received six gifts valued at more than \$27,700.

All of the gifts were from a single source, a person identified in court as a former high-level VA employee who from 2005-2009 served as Helman’s supervisor. During the 2012-2014 time period, that person was an executive consultant, and later vice president, of a consulting and lobbying firm that assisted companies in expanding their business with the VA. Helman acknowledged that, had she properly reported the gifts and their source, the VA would have done a conflict-of-interest analysis to determine whether her acceptance of the gifts was permitted under applicable laws and regulations.

Although a conviction for making a false statement to a government agency carries a maximum penalty of five years, Helman’s plea agreement provides for a term of probation.

Sentencing is set before United States District Judge Steven P. Logan on Monday, April 25, 2016.

The investigation in this case was conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the VA Office of Inspector General. The prosecution is being handled by Frank T. Galati, Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Arizona, Phoenix.

CASE NUMBER: WI-1600074-PHX-SP

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