



(April 7, 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: Veterans omnibus bill moves ahead, despite brewing fight**  
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Reported by Military Times

Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-GA) (R) talks to reporters following the weekly Republican Senate policy luncheon at the U.S. Capitol June 23, 2015.(Photo: Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)

The Senate Veterans Affairs Committee chairman says he's confident Congress can still pass a veterans omnibus bill by Memorial Day, despite a brewing fight over new accountability measures for VA employees.

Details of the massive reform measure still have not been made public. Sen. Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., said he spoke Tuesday to committee Democrats and the White House to build support for his omnibus draft, which will include not only the employment rules but also changes to the VA Choice Card program, new caregivers support, and a host of other issues.

“We have a great bill,” Isakson said. “Hopefully the president will get on board. If anybody needs it, he needs it, and our veterans deserve it. I’m optimistic, more so after our conference call.”

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[Marco Rubio has a new plan to purge the VA of 'corrupt and incompetent' employees](#)

Isakson anticipates unveiling the draft legislation within days. While veterans advocates will comb through the plan's numerous details, most eyes will be focused on the accountability piece.

In recent months, VA officials have asked Congress to switch the department's senior executives to Title 38 status, a technical change which would allow more flexibility in hiring, pay and firing rules.

The Senior Executive Association has loudly protested this move, saying it would undermine those executives' appeal rights and unfairly scapegoat them for the department's numerous problems.

Meanwhile, House Republicans have said those proposals don't go far enough.

House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla., has been pushing his own "VA Accountability Act" as a necessary addition to Isakson's omnibus. That plan, already passed by the House along party lines, would make it easier to fire or demote any VA employee, not just the few hundred executives covered under the VA proposal.

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[VA: Accountability means more than just firing people](#)

But House Democrats and the White House have strongly opposed that measure, calling it an attempt to undermine federal employment protections.

Miller last week sent a letter to Isakson saying leaving the House-passed bill out of the omnibus would allow VA to continue to "coddle and protect corrupt and incompetent bureaucrats" instead of fixing the problem.

On Tuesday, Isakson brushed off that criticism and said he also has concerns with Miller's proposal.

"I'm not going to get into our accountability section until we're ready to unveil," he said. "We've done a much more comprehensive look at it, to target the real problems and the real areas for accountability.

"Anybody can write a letter. We're going to produce legislation and work with the house to get a joint bill together that solves everybody's problems when it comes to accountability."

Isakson also said he's confident he can craft legislation that the White House will support, unlike the Miller bill.

But the final measure still will have to be passed by the House before it can become law, and Miller will play a key role in shepherding the legislation through that chamber or defeating it. Isakson downplayed the idea of conflict between the two committees, calling Miller's public lobbying on behalf of his own proposal "nothing personal."

House lawmakers return to Capitol Hill from their spring recess next Monday. Isakson would not say whether his omnibus draft will be waiting for them when they arrive.