
P R E S S R E L E A S E

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
FEBRUARY 3, 2021

Contact: communication@afgenvac.org

This week the Senate is expected to vote to confirm Denis McDonough as the new Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). In response to the confirmation, Alma L. Lee, President of the American Federation of Government Employees National Veterans Affairs Council (AFGE NVAC), which represents 265,000 VA workers across the country, issued the following statement:

AFGE NVAC looks forward to working with the new VA Secretary to solve the issues that have plagued VA employees for years and to develop a mutual respect between the VA and union that was non-existent under the Trump administration.

VA workers have high hopes and expectations for Secretary McDonough and the Biden administration. Our members welcome the new administration's effort to turn the VA into a workplace that provides dignity, fairness and respect - the opposite of the previous administration. Our members anticipate Secretary McDonough will use the powers available to him to address administrative issues and to call on Congress to fix problems that must be remedied legislatively.

We also look forward to Secretary McDonough overhauling the VA's Covid-19 response and making the VA a safe place for employees and the veterans they care for. The Biden administration has already begun the effort, putting new standards and requirements in place for federal facilities, including a mask mandate, but much work remains. We hope to see swift action from Secretary McDonough on a number of pressing Covid-19 related issues, such as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) shortages and the lack of transparency and consistency on VA policies toward employees battling the pandemic on the frontlines, as well as action on long standing issues, including employees being fired without due process and denied access to their union.

Our members have been fighting for a fair contract for years, demanding safe working conditions and adequate staffing levels, the space and equipment VA workers need to ensure veterans receive the best care possible, and mechanisms to protect workers from the whims of management. All of which occurred under an administration and former VA secretary that treated the workforce like an adversary that in turn negatively impacted workers' health, safety and livelihood.

There is a lot to repair, and we look forward to working with Secretary McDonough toward meaningful change.

###