



(December 17, 2015)

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: Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs Gibson Defends VA Discipline Guidelines

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FEDERAL HEALTH MATTERS

In a congressional hearing, Gibson states that firing is not the answer and outlines his plans to speed conduct-based punishment.

On December 9, VA Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson spoke to the House Veterans' Affairs Committee and criticized the push to fire VA officials accused of misconduct by the Office of Inspector General (OIG). He stated the VA shouldn't "administer punishment based on IG opinions, Department of Justice, recycled and embellished media accounts, or external pressure." OIG reports should serve only as a summary of the evidence that the agency acquired and reviewed. Gibson maintains that the VA must administer punishments based on its own judgment.

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Instead of firing officials Gibson believes the VA should be focusing on “sustainable accountability,” and foster employees’ good conduct through positive reinforcement.

“In my many years in the private sector, I’ve never encountered an organization where leadership was measured by how many people you fired,” said Gibson during the hearing.

However, where discipline is needed, Gibson said that the VA would no longer wait for the conclusion of outside investigation before moving forward with punishment. The agency also will shorten the time punished employees are put on paid leave.

Congress passed 2 new rules to hasten dismissal of VA senior executives, but there have been complaints that the VA has been slow to enforce these rules.

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For example, the agency had little success in disciplining Kimberly Graves and Diana Rubens, demoting their positions instead of firing the VA officials. The agency also allowed Graves and Rubens to keep the \$400,000 gained in the relocation scheme.

The OIG released a statement clarifying their position within the report covered during the hearing: “The OIG’s role is to provide oversight of VA’s programs, operations, and people. Inspectors General have no authority or responsibility for program functions. It is a VA program function to take any type of action, be it writing a policy, educating and training staff, or taking disciplinary or performance based administrative action.”

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Now that administrative errors have been assessed, the OIG expects the VA to “take appropriate steps to protect the due process rights of these individuals as well as all employees as they move forward with appropriate accountability actions.”