



*(December 18, 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:** [Federal Times: A civil service holiday wish list](#)

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'Tis the holiday season, a time for giving, and a time for wishing—even (or especially) for Federal employees. So in the spirit of the season, here is my holiday wish list for 2015  
First, for Acting Director Beth Cobert and my former colleagues at the Office of Management and Personnel:

- First and foremost, I wish you all a clean 'bill of health' for the security of your agency's networks and data (mine too!). In my memory—and it's a long one—nothing has shaken confidence in my old agency like the security clearance breaches, and OPM must find a way to overcome that crisis. The good news is that Director Cobert is doing all the right things, so I'm optimistic, but until OPM gets past this, it can't get back to its core mission.
- That core mission is the basis for my second wish: that OPM reassert itself as the federal government's strategic human capital thought leader. Here again, the signs are promising—for example, just last week, OPM convened a series of working groups to attack the federal government's cyber talent gap (finally), and implementation of the president's expected SES executive order will also require strong leadership on the agency's part.
- And that leads to my last wish: For sustained, forward-thinking leadership at the top of OPM, not just through the end of this administration, but also for the longer term. Whether those career leaders in place today are up to that challenge (or not) is for Director Cobert to judge, but preparing that leadership cadre for what's next could be her most lasting legacy.

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[How OPM will build a federal workforce of the future](#)

Next, for Acting Under Secretary of Defense Brad Carson and my former colleagues in the Department of Defense:

- Acting Under Secretary Carson is the visionary behind DOD's long-needed Force of the Future (FOTF) initiative, a complete 'refresh' of the Department's antiquated military and civilian personnel systems. That's a daunting task under even the best of circumstances, but it's even more difficult in the final months of an Administration. So for Under Secretary Carson, I fervently wish for a miraculous parting of the Pentagon's bureaucratic Red Seas to make way for the 21st century.
- It may sound a bit odd, but I wish for some official congressional sanction of the Force of the Future initiative—perhaps even to include a legislative requirement for detailed plans and progress reports. I know that sounds like begging for more bureaucracy, but nothing helps sustain the momentum of a china-breaking effort like FOTF than the constructive support and attention of Congress.
- In the Pentagon (and a lot of other places), what gets measured gets done, and when that measurement comes from outside the department, it can help sustain the momentum. I also wish that Congress would give Under Secretary Carson special statutory authority to conduct pilots of some or all of those FOTF initiatives that will ultimately require legislation.

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[DoD 'Force of the Future' includes civilian Digital Service team](#)

And for Secretary Bob MacDonald and Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson at the Veterans Affairs Department:

- Many of the challenges confronting VA are eerily similar to those that faced the Internal Revenue Service almost two decades ago, and many of the legislative gifts Congress gave us way back then would be a great present for Secretary MacDonald. So that's my wish for them: an Oversight Board to monitor the day-to-day progress of the transformation, 'streamlined critical pay' positions that allowed VA to recruit top-notch executive and technical talent.

To J. David Cox, Tony Reardon, Bill Dougan, and the presidents of the other Federal employee unions:

- To come true, many of the wishes on my holiday list will require the support of the unions that represent the employees of the agencies involved, and that may not be easy to come by. In my experience, the only way to overcome that skepticism is to give those union leaders a real seat at the table – along with the opportunity to see everything, propose anything, and collaborate with their agency counterparts before decisions are made. That has to include management decisions that are not otherwise subject to collective bargaining.

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And finally, to our much-maligned federal employees:

- This has been a pretty tough year—indeed, a pretty tough decade. And while the uptick in the most recent satisfaction scores and the modest proposed pay raise offer a glimmer of hope, the morale of the federal workforce is nowhere near where it should be. To all of them I wish the strength and fortitude to carry on, knowing that what you do is vitally important, even if the American public often takes it for granted. And the public does experience what you do first-hand, I wish you the wherewithal to make that experience positively memorable.

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