



BACKGROUND MEMO FOR REPORTERS

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ICYMI: THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S FIRST 12 DAYS IN OFFICE FOR VETERANS AND VA EMPLOYEES

Since taking office on January 20, 2025, the Trump Administration has taken the following actions impacting veterans and employees at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA):

- 1. Placed a hiring freeze on critical VA employees serving veterans:** On his first day in office, President Trump instituted a [hiring](#) freeze on VA employees. Days later and after many doctors and medical personnel nationwide already had their job offers rescinded, the Trump Administration exempted certain VA health care employees. However, this exemption still excludes a number of critical positions at VA – including all positions at the Veterans Benefits Administration who continue to process historically high numbers of claims for benefits thanks to the *PACT Act*, social workers helping homeless veterans find housing, National Cemetery Administration employees working to memorialize our veterans, and critical hospital support staff.
- 2. Illegally froze federal aid for critical programs serving veterans and their families:** On Monday, January 27, the Trump Administration issued a [memo to freeze](#) all federal grants – with a total and complete lack of guidance on the potential impact of this on veterans. It was not clarified for nearly 24 hours that VA programs would be excluded from this freeze, causing chaos and confusion at organizations serving veterans across the country.

The Administration's efforts to freeze federal funds – which they [continue to uphold](#) – puts non-VA programs veterans and their families rely on at-risk. This includes programs that provide job assistance for homeless veterans, Veteran Treatment Courts helping veterans struggling with substance abuse or mental health disorders, housing vouchers for veterans, Medicare, and Medicaid. Many organizations with veterans' suicide prevention and homelessness grants also rely on non-VA federal funding to continue operations and serve veterans.

- 3. Forced hard working VA employees to choose between their devotion to veterans and blind allegiance to the President's political ideology with unauthorized 'buy out' offers:** On Tuesday, January 28, 2025, the Office of Personnel Management sent a delayed resignation [offer](#) to VA employees, urging them to resign if they cannot commit to embracing the Trump Administration's "standards of suitability and conduct." This includes offering resignations for doctors and nurses—positions already facing shortages—with no commitment to backfill their positions. Employees who opt-in may not be able to rescind their resignation if they change their mind or file suit if the Trump Administration does not provide pay and benefits through the agreed-to resignation date.
- 4. Fired VA's top watchdog official in charge of protecting veterans from waste and wrongdoing:** The President [fired](#) VA Inspector General Missal, alongside 17 other non-partisan, independent Inspectors Generals, last Friday night in a midnight purge. This went against a [law](#) passed in 2022 that

required the President to provide 30 days' notice and extensive reasoning before removing an Inspector General.

As Inspector General, Missal has identified more than \$40 billion in waste, fraud, and abuse at VA since 2016 in Democratic and Republican Administrations. The Inspector General is the top watchdog in charge of protecting veterans from wrongdoing and ensuring their quality of care and benefits.

- 5. Dismantled critical programs that increase the accessibility of VA benefits and care to veterans:** On his first day in office, President Trump issued a “DEIA” executive order, leaving the door open for many of VA’s critical initiatives – such as conducting *PACT Act* outreach in rural or minority communities, ensuring VA is accessible for veterans with disabilities, and implementing health care quality improvement projects focused on equity – to be stripped. The Trump Administration also placed more than 60 employees focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion on leave.
- 6. Pulled thousands of at-risk Afghan allies from flights, despite years-long efforts from America’s veterans:** On his first day in office, the Trump Administration moved to [cancel the flights](#) of nearly 1,660 Afghan allies and family members of active-duty U.S. military personnel under President Donald Trump’s order suspending U.S. refugee programs. Veterans have led the efforts to evacuate and resettle Afghans who supported U.S. military operations over decades.
- 7. Refused to renounce dangerous proposals to means-testing veterans’ disability compensation benefits and efforts to claw back benefits from millions of veterans:** President Trump’s nominee to lead the Office of Management and Budget, Russell Vought, [refused to condemn](#) proposals to begin means-testing veterans’ benefits and cut disability compensation for veterans below a certain disability rating during his nomination hearing. Vought had previously included these priorities in his [budget proposal](#) as President of the Center for Renewing America.
- 8. Politicized the work of VA employees dedicated to serving veterans and their families:** On day one of his Administration, President Trump [issued guidance](#) to reinstitute “[Schedule F](#)” and move tens of thousands of career, non-partisan federal employees into the same category as political appointees—stripping them of employment and due process rights. This includes countless VA employees who have dedicated their careers to putting veterans first, not politics. In addition, veterans make up more than 25 percent of VA’s workforce, which is comprised of more than 400,000 VA employees nationwide.
- 9. Started a witch hunt in VA’s workforce:** In addition to [threatening disciplinary action](#) against employees who do not report potential violations of Trump’s crackdown on DEIA programs and staff, the Trump Administration is reviewing all [newly-hired VA employees](#). These “probationary” employees can be fired without the [due process rights](#) afforded to most civil servants. This comes at a time when VA faces staffing shortages and increased demand for its services, such as urgently needed mental health care to reduce the veteran suicide rate.
- 10. Fired directors of critical offices serving women veterans, the largest growing veteran demographic:** On Wednesday, January 29, the directors of the Center for Women Veterans and the Center for Minority Veterans were both abruptly dismissed. These positions were dismissed during a critical time when veterans – especially women veterans and minority veterans – would benefit from stability.

A staunch advocate of protecting and defending veterans’ health care and benefits, Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee Ranking Member Richard Blumenthal released the following statement in response to these dangerous policies and actions the Trump Administration has taken against veterans and VA employees:

“Make no mistake – the Trump Administration’s dangerous and unlawful actions will decrease access to care for veterans across the country, delay delivery of recently-expanded benefits for toxic-exposed veterans and their families, and disrupt a wide array of critical services and opportunities they rely upon. These actions make it clear: this Administration seeks to prevent VA from filling critical vacancies to deliver timely health care, to impair the ability of the Veterans Benefits Administration to deliver veterans benefits, to demonize and confuse VA employees, and to sideline independent oversight bodies like the Inspector General who hold VA accountable. Veterans trust their government to deliver what they have earned, and the Trump Administration has chosen to betray that trust. As Ranking Member of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee, I will fight every effort that reneges on our promises to veterans and their families.”