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February 19, 2025

The Honorable Doug Collins  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Collins:

On January 23, 2025, we joined Ranking Member Takano and our colleagues in writing the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) requesting more information regarding President Trump's "Hiring Freeze Guidance" Memorandum to Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials (enclosed). We asked the VA to provide a response to our letter no later than February 7 and provide a briefing to Committee staff no later than February 11. Despite these deadlines, the Committee has not received any correspondence from you or your staff on these requests.

On January 21, 2025, VA exempted 44 Veterans Health Administration (VHA) positions from the hiring freeze. Days later, VA employees began receiving "Fork in the Road" emails from the White House Office of Personnel Management offering deferred resignations from their positions, which was ultimately stayed by a Federal court. On February 11, VA shared with the Committee a list of over 130 occupations that are "ineligible" for deferred resignation. It is still unclear to the Committee when individuals within these occupations were notified that they are ineligible for the deferred resignation and what the impact may be on those ineligible employees who had previously accepted deferred resignation. Given that approximately 30% of all federal employees are veterans, it is imperative to understand how these workforce reductions—through the hiring freezes, forced resignations, and elimination of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) positions—will impact veteran employees and their ability to continue serving their fellow veterans within VA.

While we find the legal justification for the deferred resignation offer lacking, we are confused as to why many of the occupations deemed ineligible for deferred resignation were not also exempt from the hiring freeze. For example, individuals in occupations like biomedical

engineering, housekeeping and sterile processing, and claims examiners have been deemed too essential to be eligible for the buyout scam you have offered, but not essential enough to hire additional employees to adequately staff our medical centers, clinics, cemeteries, and regional offices to meet VA's mission.

Further, President Trump's February 11, 2025, Executive Order to "Implement the President's 'Department of Government Efficiency' Workforce Optimization Initiative" by requiring four employees to depart federal service for every one employee hired will have drastic consequences on services that the American public and our veterans rely on.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, by requiring what is essentially an enterprise-wide hiring freeze on an already emaciated workforce at VA, veterans will be left with substandard care, decreased access, and negative outcomes.

We are deeply concerned your haphazard approach to overseeing the VA workforce will have detrimental and dangerous effects on the ability of the agency to provide world-class health care and benefits to our veterans.

We request that the VA provide full answers to the questions contained in the Committee's January 23, 2025, letter by the end of this week. We also request answers to these additional questions and requests:

1. Please provide complete and unredacted copies of all guidance and memoranda issued to VA leadership and/or staff regarding the deferred resignation or "Fork in the Road" offer.
2. Please provide a detailed explanation regarding the justification for each of the 130 occupations VA deemed "ineligible" for deferred resignation.
3. Please provide a detailed explanation regarding the justification for each occupation VA deemed ineligible for deferred resignation but that remains subject to the hiring freeze.
4. When were VA employees within the 130 occupations notified that they were deemed "ineligible" for the deferred resignation program?
5. For those VA employees who accepted the deferred resignation but were later deemed "ineligible," will the VA be removing them from their position?
6. As of the date of your response to this letter, how many VA employees have accepted the deferred resignation offer? Please provide a detailed breakdown of this data and include occupation, estimated cost of loss of the position, and estimated cost of fulfilling the duties of the position through outsourcing, contracts, or other means.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. White House, *Implementing the President's "Department of Government Efficiency" Workforce Optimization Initiative* (Executive Order) (February 11, 2025).

7. The February 11 Executive Order directs agency heads to limit hiring to essential positions. Are those employees who were ineligible for the deferred resignation program now deemed “essential positions?” Please provide a full list of occupations that are deemed “essential positions,” as well as a detailed explanation regarding the justification for each position.
8. How many employees does the VA employ that are considered “temporary employees” or “reemployed annuitants” within the Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefits Administration, the National Cemetery Administration, and the enterprise level, and therefore subject to the large-scale reductions in force (RIFs) as required by the February 11 executive order? Please provide detailed data related to employees who may be subject to RIFs, broken down by occupation, estimated cost of the loss of the position, and estimated cost of fulfilling the duties of the position through outsourcing, contracts, or other means.
9. Will those employees who are separated under RIFs or the deferred resignation program count towards the 4:1 attrition to hiring ratio as required in the Executive Order? If not, when does this measure begin?
10. How does the VA plan to track the attrition of these employees, the effects of the attrition on veteran access to care and services, and the impact this required 4:1 ratio of attrition to hiring will have on the VA’s onboarding timelines?
11. Taking into account that 30% of all federal employees are veterans, how does the VA plan to manage attrition? Please provide detailed data related to employee attrition including their veteran status, occupation, and estimated cost of the loss of their positions. Additionally, how will the VA ensure that the forced reduction in the workforce does not disproportionately affect veterans currently employed by the federal government, particularly those who rely on their positions for healthcare and transition support post-service?
12. How will the elimination of DEI programs and positions impact veteran employees, particularly those from historically underrepresented backgrounds? Will the VA conduct an assessment on how removing these programs affects the hiring, promotion, and retention of veterans within the agency? Additionally, what measures will the VA implement to ensure veterans, including those with disabilities, women, and minorities, continue to have access to equal employment opportunities and workplace support?

We ask that you respond to these questions no later than **February 28, 2025**. Additionally, we request that you provide a briefing to Committee staff no later than **March 7, 2025**. Should you have any questions about this request, you may contact Ms. Ally Cimino (Ally.Cimino@mail.house.gov) with the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. Thank you for your review and response to these concerns.

The Honorable Doug Collins

February 19, 2025

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Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



**Delia Ramirez**

Ranking Member

Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations



**Timothy Kennedy**

Member

Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations



**Dr. Herb Conaway**

Member

Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations

Cc: The Honorable Jen Kiggans, Chairwoman

Enclosure