

**Committee on Veterans' Affairs**  
**Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations**  
**U.S. House of Representatives, Congress of the United States**

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Members of the House Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, thank you for this opportunity to share my observations about the Department of Veterans' Affairs. I previously testified before this Committee in March, 2002, and I have assisted VA in their enterprise architecture, cyber security, project management, IT contingency planning, and IT workforce efforts. I have done similar work for the Executive Office of the President, as well as many other public and private enterprises.

VA has tens of thousands of dedicated, hard-working employees committed to the important mission of serving our nations veterans and their families. But there is a dark side to VA. Its bureaucratic culture is unprincipled, profligate, and intransigent. I have seen them ignore Congress, GAO, OMB, and one Executive appointee after another. Oh, they know how to play the game to get the Executive and Congress to open the budget floodgates, but VA doesn't really care how the dollars are actually spent as long as it doesn't interfere with business as usual at VA.

I have personally seen VA personnel sabotage and subvert hundreds of millions of dollars worth of IT projects and read about billions more wasted on other failures. I have seen a total disregard for one cyber security effort after another. These are only the tip of the iceberg. And why do such things happen at VA? Largely because these systems and efforts would make the utilization of budget and personnel more transparent and thereby make accountability possible.

Changing VA's culture will not be easy, or fast. Three critical ingredients are needed:

- First is accountability. Nothing can change unless and until those who refuse to follow the law or their lawful leaders, and those who waste, subvert, steal, and deceive are held accountable. Not promoted or moved to another position or another agency as is often the case, but reprimanded, demoted, and even fired or prosecuted when necessary. The lack of accountability is why the people at VA do whatever they want, whenever they want.
- The second critical success factor is courageous leadership. Nothing can change unless VA's political appointees and Congress actually hold VA accountable. At a minimum

this means communicating expectations, measuring performance, and following up. This includes rewarding right behaviors, but it also means cutting off the dollars and terminating those who refuse to be part of the solution. This requires courage.

- Thirdly, changing VA's culture will require patience and perseverance. Fully bringing about such a change will take a decade or more. It will require a clear vision of where VA should go – This has existed for years in the concept of OneVA, but that has become little more than a phrase to ignore or pronounce when useful. Change will also require good parenting – of both the nurturing and disciplined variety. It seems perhaps that this Committee is best suited for this role since, like the VA bureaucracy, it has a stronger element of continuity than the Executive and their appointees. And this Committee carries the big stick of budget, and has the GAO to provide it with independent performance measurements.

Bringing about a culture change at VA will not be easy – the forces for the status quo are powerful, apprehensive, and treacherous. But the forces for good at VA are also there to be nurtured. Positive culture change at VA can happen. We all know it should happen, for the good of the Veterans and the rest of the country. And just maybe, if we start with VA, this kind of change can happen elsewhere in Washington. Certainly it is needed elsewhere. So if you ever wondered why so many projects fail at VA, or why DOD can't pass an electronic medical record to VA when a soldier becomes a veteran, or why the parts of Homeland Security still can't share information, you now know the answer. The culture is badly broken. But it can be fixed: If we have the courage, patience, and perseverance to make it happen.