



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

June 13, 2014



The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) proudly joins the Nation in commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This momentous piece of legislation codified America's commitment to equal rights and social justice in American society.

Throughout history, our leaders recognized that Veterans have represented every aspect of this Nation's great diversity. Several examples of this were as early as 1842 when pensions were authorized for specific Native American warriors who aided our Nation during the War of 1812. African Americans were authorized to enlist into the Federal armed forces for the first time in 1862, and later received Federal benefits for their service. Women nurses aiding Federal forces during the Civil War were authorized pensions in 1892 and were later authorized to be buried in national cemeteries. And decades later, the WWII Filipino Veterans Equity Compensation Fund and one-time payments were authorized for eligible Filipino Veterans who served in World War II.

Accordingly, we know it is critical that VA's workforce reflects the diversity of the Veterans we serve. VA employed its first African American medical doctor in 1921 and appointed its first African American director of a medical facility in 1923. Since that time, VA has worked diligently to ensure all Veterans receive equitable services regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, or gender.

In 2008, the VA Office of Diversity and Inclusion was created and VA issued its first VA strategic plan focused on diversity and inclusion. In its plan, VA articulates its goals to build a diverse workforce, an inclusive workplace, and provide outstanding, culturally competent service to our Nation's Veterans. We are proud of the advances VA has made in serving and employing individuals with disabilities. VA also recognizes that the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community is an integral part of our human diversity, and we support our LGBT Veterans and workforce through employee protections, customized patient care, and continuing education.

These initiatives are a testament to VA's commitment to civil rights, equity, and diversity in the workplace and beyond. We are proud of our progress, but recognize there is more work to do. VA will continue to promote fairness, diversity, and inclusion in its services and workforce. We thank all of our partners and stakeholders in the public, private, and academic sectors in our common goal of supporting our Nation's Veterans, as we celebrate and commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Civil Rights Act.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Sloan D. Gibson", is positioned above the printed name.

Sloan D. Gibson
Acting Secretary