



Upcoming Events

December 2016

Universal Human Rights Month

Rosa Parks Day
World AIDS Day
December 1

International Day of
Persons with Disabilities
December 3

Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day
December 7

Human Rights Day & Week
December 10–16

Bill of Rights Day
December 15

Hanukkah
December 24–January 1

Christmas
December 25

Kwanzaa
December 26–January 1

New Year's Eve
December 31

Message from the DAS

As several holidays approach, I extend my heartfelt greetings and thanks to all of you. Please join VA and the Nation in commemorating International Day of Persons with Disabilities on December 3, Human Rights Day on December 10, Human Rights Week December 10–17, and Bill of Rights Day on December 15. Read more in the Commemorate article below.

[The Secretary's Annual Equal Employment Opportunity, Diversity and Inclusion, No FEAR, and Whistleblower Protection Policy Statement](#) is now available online. Differences from last year's policy include language incorporating the Wounded Warriors Federal Leave Act of 2015 and bathroom access for transgender employees.

On a parting note for 2016, last month we witnessed the exercise of our most precious gift in America—the right to determine our own future through the peaceful transition of power in our country. Irrespective of one's political persuasion, we can all take pride and comfort in the awesome resilience of our democratic process. Above all partisanship, Americans share a common thread of love of country and the principles for which it stands. As we have done in the past, we work together to ensure that those ideals are preserved and protected for all Americans.

For those of us in the diversity and inclusion professional community, know that our work remains as relevant and critical as ever. We must continue to work hard to promote understanding and advance the coda that true inclusion means giving voice to all, not just those with whom we agree. As proud champions of diversity and inclusion, your important work continues. Thank you as always for what you do.
– *Georgia Coffey*



Georgia Coffey

Commemorate

International Day of Persons with Disabilities

VA joins the Nation in commemorating International Day of Persons with Disabilities on December 3. From the [2015 Presidential Proclamation: The United States has long been a leading voice for the rights of persons with disabilities, and we join the international community in expressing our support for them in all they do and in recognizing them as the valuable members of society that they are. This year, as we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\) -- landmark legislation that helps ensure the places that make up our shared national life truly belong to everyone -- we also recognize that protecting the rights of those with disabilities is not just an American ideal, but a cornerstone of our work to ensure human rights around the globe. \(Continued on the next page.\)](#)

ORM

Steps Toward Resolution

[Alternative Dispute Resolution \(202-461-0280\)](#) can help with resolving conflict. To file a discrimination or harassment complaint, you must contact the [Office of Resolution Management](#) at (toll free) 888-737-3361 within 45 calendar days of the date of the alleged discriminatory incident.

Commemorate

[Continued from the previous page](#)

On International Day of Persons with Disabilities, we rededicate ourselves to building a fairer and more accessible world and to upholding the fundamental dignity and respect of all people.

A quarter-century ago, our Nation marked a milestone in the long march toward achieving equal opportunity for all with the passage of the ADA. A result of quiet persistence and perseverance coupled with passionate and vocal advocacy, this Act showed the world our full commitment to the rights of people with disabilities, and in these past 25 years, we have built on the foundation of equality laid by this law....Each day, our founding values of equality and opportunity guide our work to forge a bright future for people with disabilities. Serving to protect these ideals are our brave men and women in uniform who give of themselves for us all, and when they return home with wounds of war, seen or unseen, it is our sacred obligation to ensure they can take full advantage of the freedoms they fought so hard to defend....As we continue working to expand the promise of America to all our people, we must remember that the fight for disability rights should not stop at our Nation's shores. The United States continues to uphold our global commitment to the international disability community....A pillar of American leadership is our profound respect for the human dignity of all people, and it is imperative that we reach for a day when all of the more than 1 billion people of the world who live with a disability can enjoy the same rights afforded to those living here at home.

Our pursuit of equal rights for those with disabilities is not over. Today, we stand on the shoulders of generations who fought for better laws, demanded better treatment, and who, by being good, decent people and hard workers, proved to the world that having a disability should not force individuals into the margins of society. On this day, let us honor the efforts of those who agitated for the respect and dignity of all by picking up the inextinguishable torch of equality and carrying it forward into a future that recognizes the incredible talents and skills of people with disabilities. Together, we can secure a tomorrow in which all people know no limits but the scope of their dreams.

For more information, visit VA's [Individuals with Disabilities Employment Program](#) Web page.



3 December
**International Day of
People with Disability**

Commemorate

Human Rights Day and Human Rights Week

VA joins the Nation in commemorating Human Rights Day on December 10 and Human Rights Week December 10–17. From the [2015 Presidential Proclamation](#): *Sixty-seven years ago, the leaders of 48 countries from around the world declared with one voice that progress depends on defending human rights, and that a nation is strongest when the contributions of its whole citizenry are valued. Today, we celebrate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights -- a milestone in our ongoing global march to uphold the inherent dignity and worth of every person. To honor the legacy of this historic document and to help ensure that its ideals endure for generations to come, we reaffirm our commitment to upholding the freedoms it safeguards, which are the birthright of all humanity.*

When rights are suppressed, human potential is stifled. A nation draws upon new talents and ideas when opposition parties are fairly represented and those in power are accountable to their citizens at the ballot box. A free and independent press and a vibrant civil society can inform the public, expose corruption, and empower citizens to participate in self-governance. And when institutions are built to protect rights and freedoms, rather than serve the interests of those in power, those institutions can provide the stable foundation for stability needed for future generations to thrive.

In too many places around the world we see rights and freedoms denied. People are imprisoned for peaceful worship and girls are barred from attending school. LGBT individuals are subject to abuse because of who they are and who they love, and citizens are prevented from petitioning those in power for change. The United States of America stands in solidarity with those seeking to realize a brighter and freer future for themselves and their families, whether in their home country or as immigrants in a new land. We will continue to lift up the lives of all who yearn to exercise their inherent human rights and to shine a light on those still living in the darkest pockets of our world.

The strongmen of today will never extinguish the hope that persists around the world. Dissenters may be jailed, but ideas can never be imprisoned. Controlling access to information will not turn lies into truths, nor will it deter the longing for justice that stirs in every human soul. (Continued on [the next page.](#))

Commemorate

[Continued from the previous page](#)

And refusing to recognize the basic dignity of every man, woman, and child -- regardless of gender, background, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or belief -- will only lend further momentum to the quest for equality that for generations has stirred hearts and spurred action. On this day, and every day, let us remember our roots as one human family, forever dedicated to upholding the central tenets of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Bill of Rights Day

VA joins the Nation in commemorating the Bill of Rights Day on December 15. From the [2015 Presidential Proclamation](#): *The ratification of the Bill of Rights on December 15, 1791, marked one of our country's earliest and most important steps toward ensuring that the ideals enshrined in our founding documents are the birthright of all Americans. Written to guarantee our fledgling Nation would never succumb to the tyranny it fought against, these first 10 Amendments to our Constitution help safeguard the bedrock principles of equality, liberty, and justice. In the years since, America has carried forward the spirit enshrined in the Bill of Rights -- recognizing that freedom is a value we must forever work to uphold.*

Each generation is tasked with continuing the work of perfecting our Nation. In the 224 years since this codification of our most fundamental freedoms, America has been propelled by the persistent effort of her citizens -- people from all walks of life who have accepted the challenge of pushing to expand liberty to all. The same American instinct that sparked our revolution and spurred the creation of the Bill of Rights still inspires us to step forward to defend our founding ideals. It is what inspired a groundbreaking convention in Seneca Falls, drove courageous people to march in Selma, and started a transformative movement for LGBT rights at a bar in New York City. Generations of heroes who believed America is a constant work in progress have advocated and sacrificed to realize that progress and have worked to uphold the belief at the heart of the Bill of Rights: Free men and women have the capacity to shape their own destiny and forge a fairer and more just world for all who follow.

Today, we stand on the shoulders of those who dedicated their lives to upholding the meaning of our founding documents throughout changing times -- a mission made possible by the fundamental liberties secured in the Bill of Rights. As we reflect on the strides we have made to lift up an engaged citizenry, we pay tribute to the extraordinary foresight of our Founders who granted the protections that enable us to bring about the change we seek. Let us recommit to continuing our legacy as a Nation that rejects complacency, empowers its citizens to recognize and redress its imperfections, and embraces the struggle of improving our democracy so that all our people are able to make of their lives what they will.

VACO Professional Development Workshop

VA/AAFEA/AAGEN Partner to Provide Training

On September 22, 2016, ODI partnered with the African American Federal Executives Association (AAFEA) and the Asian American Government Executives Network (AAGEN) to host a Professional Development Workshop at VA Central Office.

The workshop consisted of a Senior Executive Service (SES) employee who provided keynote remarks who shared their experiences on working towards and attaining senior management and SES level positions within the Federal government. Additionally, there was an overview of the Executive Core Qualifications and roundtable "flash" mentoring discussions between participants and guest GS-15 and SES mentors. The event concluded with an optional networking session designed for participants to intermingle with the GS-15 and SES mentors and each other.

For more information about this and future events, contact [Ms. Tynnetta Lee](#), VA's National African American Employment Program Manager, ODI, or [Ms. Angela James](#), VA's National Asian American and Pacific Islander Employment Program Manager, ODI.

Employee Engagement Service

Council and Champions Bridging the Gap for Employee Engagement

“When people are financially invested, they want a return. When people are emotionally invested, they want to contribute.”
– Simon Sinek

Employee engagement is a critical component of every healthy organization, big or small. Engaged employees deliver higher productivity, enhanced performance, and greater dedication to the organizational mission. The importance of employee engagement is recognized throughout the Federal government. At VA, we are focused on improving the employee experience through increased employee engagement. This priority is critical to the Department’s mission to provide world-class care to our Veterans.

We have seen employee engagement improve over the last year. For example, the results of the [Fiscal Year \(FY\) 2016 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey \(FEVS\)](#) indicate that job satisfaction and employees’ views of their leaders have improved. Despite these improvements we recognize that we have a long way to go, and our organizational focus on employee engagement is as important as ever.

To further this goal, VA recently established the Employee Engagement Council (EEC). The EEC comprises members from each Administration and Staff Office as well as from all of our unions. The mission of the EEC is to facilitate ownership of employee engagement efforts throughout each Administration and Staff Office. The Council will address employee engagement issues impacting VA’s workforce, workplace culture, and customer service. It will also strive to develop a VA-wide framework and forum for implementing leading practices in employee engagement.

Every VA facility has also named Employee Engagement Champions to be the bridge between the EEC and VA employees and to coordinate the local implementation of engagement strategies. With support from the EEC, these Champions are publicizing engagement tools and resources, facilitating action planning, and sharing local engagement strategies. The Champions are using the FY 2016 FEVS results to develop action plans that will help improve engagement at local facilities by driving customized action, based on data from employees, to improve the VA workplace.

Through our Employee Engagement Council and Employee Engagement Champions, we will strengthen our employees’ sense of purpose and commitment to the Department and its mission. Every employee should feel engaged and empowered in the workplace to do their part toward providing excellent care and service to our family of Veterans.

For any questions related to employee engagement, contact the [Employee Engagement Service](#).

Workforce Recruitment Program

Fiscal Year 2017 Program Set to Kick-Off

VA is strongly committed to the recruitment and hiring of individuals with disabilities, including Veterans, and individuals with targeted disabilities. The fiscal year 2017 Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP) is tentatively scheduled to kick-off December 20, 2016. WRP is a recruitment and referral program that connects Federal sector employers with highly motivated college students and recent graduates with disabilities who are interested in temporary or permanent Federal jobs. Through the [WRP Web site](#), WRP maintains the largest database of Schedule A candidates for hiring into the Government. Schedule A, under 5 CFR, 213.3102(u), is an excepted service appointing authority that serves as a critical and efficient tool for hiring individuals with physical, psychiatric, or intellectual disabilities. In addition, WRP is recognized by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management as a model strategy regarding the recruitment and hiring of individuals with disabilities. VA facilities and offices interested in hiring WRP interns should contact [Aurelia Waters](#), VA’s WRP Manager.



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