Message from the DAS

After a long, cold winter season, I look forward to welcoming April and spring! I am excited to begin the fourth cycle of the Secretary’s Annual Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Awards. Information on how to nominate a VA employee, manager/supervisor, or team, will be posted shortly at http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/sec-awards.aspx. Also, I am pleased to announce that VA recently released “Guidance for Language Use by Employees in the Department of Veterans Affairs.” Read more in the Policy Alerts section on page 6.

This April, VA joins the Nation in observing National Minority Health Month and National Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month. VA does not tolerate violence or harassment in the workplace. Any VA employee who is subject to this behavior should report the matter to his or her supervisor or another appropriate official immediately. Additionally, VA does not tolerate discrimination based on sex (including gender identity, transgender status, sexual orientation, and pregnancy), among other categories. This applies to all terms and conditions of employment, including recruitment, hiring, promotions, transfers, reassignments, training, career development, benefits, and separation. This is a timely reminder as April 8 marks National Equal Pay Day when we recognize the Nation’s gender pay inequity. As of September 30, 2013, women account for 59.38 percent of the total VA workforce. VA is committed to ensuring equal employment opportunity and promoting diversity and inclusion to maintain a high-performing workforce in service to our Nation’s Veterans. Read more about these observances beginning on page 3.

Finally, please join VA and the Nation in observing Holocaust Remembrance Week from April 27 to May 4 and Holocaust Remembrance Day on April 27–28. Read more below. Continued on the next page.

Commemorate

The first Federal Inter-Agency Holocaust Remembrance Program was held in 1994 to commemorate the Days of Remembrance, an annual, national civic commemoration of the Holocaust. The purpose of the annual program—authorized through Public Law 96-388, which Congress passed on October 7, 1980, as part of honoring the Days of Remembrance—is to educate Federal employees, students, and the general public about the Holocaust.

Sponsored by 30 Federal agencies including the Department of Veterans Affairs, the 21st Annual Federal Inter-Agency Holocaust Remembrance Program will be held on Wednesday, May 7, 2014, at the Lincoln Theatre located at 1215 U Street NW in Washington, D.C. from 11:30 am to 1:00 pm. Continued on page 3.
VA has a new Strategic Plan for fiscal years 2014–2020 now available online at http://www.va.gov/performance. Note that one of VA’s Performance Goals is to increase the score of the Diversity Index. ODI formulated this algorithm to gauge workforce diversity by comparing diversity within the organization with the demographic composition of the civilian labor force. I look forward to working with you on increasing VA’s Diversity Index and thank you for your continued support and commitment! ~Georgia Coffey, VA Deputy Assistant Secretary for Diversity and Inclusion

Georgia Coffey

VA’s 25th Anniversary

A Message from the Secretary

In 1930, President Herbert Hoover created the Veterans Administration by consolidating three existent organizations—the U.S. Veterans Bureau, the National Homes for Disabled Soldiers, and the Bureau of Pensions—into an organization of 54 hospitals, 31,600 employees, and 4.7 million Veterans, many of whom had served in World War I, others who had fought in the Spanish-American War, and some even in the Civil War.

Nearly 60 years later, President Ronald Reagan signed the Department of Veterans Affairs Act of 1988, elevating the former administration to a cabinet-level Department of Veterans Affairs. President Reagan explained, then, that the “bill gives those who have borne America’s battles, who have defended the borders of freedom, who have protected our Nation’s security in war and in peace—it gives them what they have deserved for so long: a seat at the table in our national affairs.”

Saturday, March 15, we celebrate the 25th anniversary of President Reagan’s executive action. This year’s celebration coincides with our ongoing commemoration of the American Civil War—the most divisive and devastating conflict in our Nation’s history. President Abraham Lincoln’s charge to all Americans in 1865 has defined America’s covenant with its Veterans—“to care for [those] who shall have borne the battle, and for [their families and survivors].”

Today, we operate 151 medical centers, 135 community living centers, 103 residential rehabilitation treatment programs, 820 community-based outpatient clinics, 300 Vet Centers, 70 mobile Vet Centers, 56 benefits Regional Offices, and 131 national cemeteries. We keep faith with Lincoln’s covenant by serving those whose lifetimes connect us through the centuries—from the last surviving child of a Civil War Veteran, to those of the Spanish-American War, to the families of World War I, to the “lions” of our greatest generation, to the youngest Veterans of our latest generation.

All of our resources—high-quality and safe health care, disability compensation and pensions, education and training, home mortgages, life insurance, and jobs that allow them to realize the American Dream—are dedicated to honoring Lincoln’s charge to serve, without hesitation or equivocation, the 7 percent of Americans, who have safeguarded our way of life. They have earned our unwavering commitment through selfless service and immense sacrifice.

Thanks to the leadership of President Obama, the support of the Congress, the advice and assistance of Veterans Service Organizations as well as other Veterans stakeholders, and the devotion and advocacy of our 321,000 VA employees, 32 percent of whom are Veterans themselves, we have achieved remarkable results over the last 5 years.

We continue to pursue excellence in this noble mission. Our work is far from done. We must continue to envision future requirements and ensure that all generations of Veterans receive the best possible care and services in the decades ahead.

On this, our 25th anniversary as a cabinet-level Department, I am proud to serve with all of you as we achieve President Obama’s vision for transforming this Department into a 21st century organization.

For all that you have done to make this anniversary possible, and for all that we will continue to do together, you have my deepest respect and appreciation.
Commemorate

Continued from Page 1

The Holocaust survivors, rescuers, liberators, resisters or witnesses or relatives of these individuals remind us of what can happen if prejudice, hate, and intolerance against any individual or group of people are not challenged by each one of us. Guest speakers will include Irene Fogel Weiss, a Czech Jewish Holocaust Survivor; Cesare Frustaci, an Italian Jewish Holocaust Survivor; and Sead Okic, a Bosnian Muslim Survivor. VA employees are encouraged to attend with supervisory approval. Visit http://holocaustremembrance.org for more information.

National Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month

VA joins the Nation in observing National Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month this April. From the 2013 Presidential Proclamation on National Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month (http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/03/29/presidential-proclamation-national-sexual-assault-awareness-and-preventi):

In the last 20 years, our Nation has made meaningful progress toward addressing sexual assault. Where victims were once left without recourse, laws have opened a path to safety and justice; where a culture of fear once kept violence hidden, survivors are more empowered to speak out and get help. But even today, too many women, men, and children suffer alone or in silence, burdened by shame or unsure anyone will listen. This month, we recommit to changing that tragic reality by stopping sexual assault before it starts and ensuring victims get the support they need.

Sexual violence is an affront to human dignity and a crime no matter where it occurs. While rape and sexual assault affect all communities, those at the greatest risk are children, teens, and young women. Nearly one in five women will be a victim of sexual assault during college. For some groups, the rates of violence are even higher—Native American women are more than twice as likely to experience sexual assault as the general population. Moreover, we know rape and sexual assault are consistently underreported, and that the physical and emotional trauma they leave behind can last for years...

Just as we keep fighting sexual assault in our neighborhoods, we must also recommit to ending it in our military—because no one serving our country should be at risk of assault by a fellow service member. Where this crime does take place, it cannot be tolerated; victims must have access to support, and offenders must face the consequences of their actions. Members of our Armed Forces and their families can learn more about the resources available to them at 1-877-995-5247 and www.SafeHelpline.org.

All Americans can play a role in changing the culture that enables sexual violence. Each of us can take action by lifting up survivors we know and breaking the silence surrounding rape and sexual assault. To get involved, visit www.WhiteHouse.gov/1is2many.

Together, our Nation is moving forward in the fight against sexual assault. This month, let us keep working to prevent violence in every corner of America, and let us rededicate ourselves to giving survivors the bright future they deserve.

National Equal Pay Day


Over the past 4 years, the American people have come together to lift our economy out of recession and forge a foundation for lasting prosperity. Our businesses have created millions of new jobs, our stock market is rebounding, and our housing market has begun to heal. But even now, too many Americans are seeing their hard work go unrewarded because of circumstances beyond their control. Women—who make up nearly half of our Nation’s workforce—face a pay gap that means they earn 23 percent less on average than men do. That disparity is even greater for African-American women and Latinas. On National Equal Pay Day, we recognize this injustice by marking how far into the new year women have to work just to make what men did in the previous one. Continued on page 5.
Training

Training for Clergy, Laypersons, Faith-Based and Community Partners

Join the Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships to learn how faith leaders and community partners can address the spiritual and emotional needs facing returning Veterans and their families. Faith, spiritual and community leaders in Washington, D.C., Maryland and Virginia are welcome to attend the free training. A continental breakfast and lunch will be provided. The event will be held Wednesday, April 23 from 9 am to 2 pm at the Douglas Memorial United Methodist Church, 800 11th Street, NE, Washington, D.C.

For more information and to RSVP, please contact Yolanda Curtis at (202) 461-6829 or Yolanda.Curtis@va.gov.

The event is sponsored by: VA’s Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, VA’s Center for Minority Veterans, VA’s National Chaplain Center and the Douglas Memorial United Methodist Church.

Barrier Analysis Training

Barrier elimination is an important step in VA becoming a model employer. To achieve this status, VA has to create a barrier-free environment where all applicants and employees have the opportunity to compete and work to their fullest potential. This training course covers all aspects of the barrier analysis process under EEOC Management Directive 715 (MD-715) to include: analysis and interpretation of workforce statistics, trigger identification, barrier analysis investigation, action plan preparation, and action plan follow up. Each VA facility has to identify barriers and create action plans on eliminating those identified barriers. This training is intended for employees who work with the MD-715 report and for all managers. A virtual class will be offered on Thursday, April 24, 2014, from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. (EST). The session will be conducted via Microsoft Lync. Register at https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/deeplink_redirect.jsp?linkId=ITEM_DETAILS&componentID=3823179&componentTypeID=VA&revisionDate=1352313600000. Sign into TMS, click on “register now”, and register for the class you want. Spaces are available on first-come, first-served basis. Contact Ryan Pugh at (202) 461-4155 or Ryan.Pugh2@va.gov for more information.

Section 508 Training

The Section 508 Program Office currently offers training classes to help you understand Section 508 including “Creating Accessible Word Documents and Converting to Accessible PDF” and “Converting Scanned Documents to Accessible PDF.” Everyone has a responsibility to create information that meets the Federal Section 508 standards. Section 508 is a Federal law that applies to you. All courses are held live online via Lync. For more information and to enroll, e-mail the Office of Information and Technology at Section508@va.gov.

VSSC HR Reporting & Workforce Analysis Tools Training

VA uses the VHA Support Service Center (VSSC) to store human resources (HR) data for all of VA in an easy to use reporting format. This interactive training on the VSSC HR Reporting Tools is designed to alert a wide range of managers and HR, equal employment opportunity (EEO) and diversity specialists to VSSC’s HR query applications. All managers have a duty to ensure there is equal opportunity in the workplace with regard to hiring, promotions, and other terms and conditions of employment. This training provides guidance on how to properly use the applications to conduct various workforce analyses, identify triggers, and define and distinguish between Relevant Civilian Labor Force vs. Civilian Labor Force. Virtual training classes will be offered on the following dates from 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. (EST):

- Tuesday, May 13, 2014
- Wednesday, July 16, 2014
- Thursday, September 25, 2014

Each session will be conducted via Microsoft Lync. Register at https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/deeplink_redirect.jsp?linkId=ITEM_DETAILS&componentID=3823179&componentTypeID=VA&revisionDate=1352313600000. Sign into TMS, click on “register now”, and register for the class you want. Spaces are available on first-come, first-served basis. Contact Ryan Pugh at (202) 461-4155 or Ryan.Pugh2@va.gov for more information.

Diversity News: Online Training


Diversity News: Online Training

Continued on the next page.
Commemorate

Continued from Page 3

Wage inequality undermines the promise of fairness and opportunity upon which our country was founded. For families trying to make ends meet, that gap can also mean the difference between falling behind and getting ahead. When working mothers make less than their male counterparts, they have less to spend on basic necessities like child care, groceries, and rent. Small businesses see fewer customers walk through their doors. Tuition payments get harder to afford, and rungs on the ladder of opportunity get farther apart. And just as diminished wages shortchange families, they slow our entire economy—weakening growth here at home and eroding American competitiveness abroad.

To grow our middle class and spur progress in the years ahead, we need to address longstanding inequity that keeps women from earning a living equal to their efforts...

Our country has come a long way toward ensuring everyone gets a fair shot at opportunity, no matter who you are or where you come from. But our journey will not be complete until our mothers, our wives, our sisters, and our daughters are treated equally in the workplace and always see an honest day’s work rewarded with honest wages. Today, let us renew that vision for ourselves and for our children, and let us rededicate ourselves to realizing it in the days ahead.

Training (cont.)

FAPAC Conference

The Federal Asian Pacific American Council (FAPAC) will hold its National Leadership Training Program May 5–9, 2014, in Charlotte, North Carolina. This conference qualifies as training in compliance with 5 U.S.C. Chapter 41 and is open to all Federal employees. The theme is “Diverse Leadership + Expanding Opportunity: An Imperative for America.” The training program includes three parts: General Sessions, Student/Veterans Sessions, and a Career Fair. The General Sessions will cover various topics such as Leadership, Diversity & Inclusion/Equal Employment Opportunity, Career Development & Advancement, and Employees Benefits.

ODI will present a no-cost VA Agency Forum on Monday, May 5, 2014, from 1 to 5 pm, designed to provide VA employees and Veterans with information on professional/personal development, VA’s Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI) workforce demographics, leadership, and ODI workforce initiatives. Employees in the local commuting area are encouraged to attend the Forum, with supervisory approval. All attendees must follow appropriate conference attendance approval procedures established for their respective organizations. Costs associated with attending the VA Forum and/or main conference must be authorized by your organization. Additional conference and training information, such as registration costs, course descriptions, and schedules, are available at: http://www.fapac.org. To register for the VA Forum, visit https://www.tms.va.gov/learning/user/deeplink_redirect.jsp?linkId=SCHEDULED_OFFERING_DETAILS&scheduleID=2634162. Prior to registering, you must receive appropriate approvals including travel approval from your organization. For additional information, contact Andy Gonzalez, VA’s National AAPI Program Manager, ODI, at (202) 299-4320 or via e-mail at Andy.Gonzalez@va.gov.

VA Diversity Council

Next Meeting April 16

The next VA Diversity Council (VADC) quarterly meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 16, 2014, from 1:00 to 3:00 pm in VA Central Office room 830 and via teleconference. Visit http://www.diversity.va.gov/council for more information.
Policy Alerts

Religious Dress and Grooming

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) issued two new technical assistance publications addressing workplace rights and responsibilities with respect to religious dress and grooming under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The question-and-answer guide, entitled “Religious Garb and Grooming in the Workplace: Rights and Responsibilities,” (http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/publications/qa_religious_garb_grooming.cfm) and an accompanying fact sheet (http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/publications/fs_religious_garb_grooming.cfm), provide a user-friendly discussion of the applicable law, practical advice for employers and employees, and numerous case examples based on the EEOC’s litigation. Employers covered by Title VII must make exceptions to their usual rules or preferences to permit applicants and employees to follow religiously-mandated dress and grooming practices unless it would pose an undue hardship to the operation of an employer’s business. When an exception is made as a religious accommodation, the employer may still refuse to allow exceptions sought by other employees for secular reasons. Topics covered in the publications include:

• prohibitions on job segregation, such as assigning an employee to a non-customer service position because of his or her religious garb;
• accommodating religious grooming or garb practices while ensuring employer workplace needs;
• avoiding workplace harassment based on religion, which may occur when an employee is required or coerced to forgo religious dress or grooming practices as a condition of employment; and
• ensuring there is no retaliation against employees who request religious accommodation.

Guidance for Language Use by Employees in the Department of Veterans Affairs

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has stated that rules requiring employees to speak only English in the workplace violate the law unless these rules are necessary to the operation of the business. VA employees shall not be prohibited from speaking a non-English language when the conversation is not directly related to their work; for example, when they are in a break room or making a personal telephone call. Circumstances in which an English-only rule may be justified include: communications with customers or co-workers who only speak English, emergencies or other situations in which workers must speak a common language to promote safety, and cooperative work assignments. To read the entire guidance, visit http://www.diversity.va.gov/policy/eeo.aspx.

VACO/Field Notes

Welcome, New ODI Employee!

ODI Welcomes Camille Whitfield, a Management and Program Analyst on the Workforce Analysis Team. Ms. Whitfield began her Federal career in 2006 as a student employee for U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). She received her Bachelor of Arts in Women’s and Gender Studies in 2009 from The University of South Carolina and worked in CBP’s Privacy and Diversity Office. Ms. Whitfield is also a Certified Mediator and assisted with the Alternative Dispute Resolution Program. Welcome, Ms. Whitfield!

Veteran Employment Goal 40 Percent

Veterans now comprise nearly one-third (32.4 percent) of the VA workforce as we work toward VA’s goal to increase the number to 40 percent. As of February 2014, VA employs more than 110,000 Veterans. VA continues to rank second only to the Department of Defense in the number of Veterans in the workplace. The Veteran Employment Services Office (VESO) within the Office of Human Resources and Administration leads VA’s efforts to recruit, retain and reintegrate Veterans into VA through its VA for Vets program. VESO encourages all Veteran employees to follow up with their servicing Human Resources (HR) Office or HR Liaison to ensure their official personnel record is properly coded to reflect their Veteran status. VA remains committed to recruiting the most qualified Veterans and non-Veterans to join the workforce and contribute to our mission of serving Veterans. If you are a Hiring Manager looking to fill vacant positions with qualified Veterans, regardless of location, contact the VESO office at (202) 461-7759. For additional information on VESO and the VA for Vets program, visit http://vaforvets.va.gov.
National Minority Health Month

“Prevention is Power: Taking Action for Health Equity”

Minorities are more likely to have diabetes

Diabetes affects multiple organs; the right medication and diet can prevent these complications.

Ask your Primary Care Provider about screening and treatment for diabetes.

Veterans Health Administration
Office of Health Equity

April 2014
VA's workforce diversity remains relatively steady through February 2014. Although the VA workforce increased by 3,668 employees since the beginning of the fiscal year, the changes in representation for all groups in VA’s permanent and temporary workforce were negligible.

Comparing the demographic characteristics of VA’s workforce against the Relevant Civilian Labor Force (RCLF)*, the representation of White women, Hispanic men and women, and Asian men are lower than expected. White women representation is currently at 78 percent of RCLF, Hispanic men are at 80 percent, Hispanic women are at 62 percent, and Asian men are at 94 percent of RCLF.

**Diversity Index**

The Diversity Index is a single measure of workforce diversity that measures the convergence of VA’s aggregate workforce distribution by race, ethnicity, and gender to the Civilian Labor Force (CLF)** or RCLF. Since September 2013, the RCLF-based diversity index increased 0.30 percent and the CLF-based diversity index increased 0.28 percent.

**People with Targeted Disabilities**

The proportion of people with targeted disabilities in VA’s workforce has increased by 0.05 percentage points since the beginning of the fiscal year. In fiscal year 2014, we continue to exceed the Secretary’s 2 percent onboard goal.

The hiring of people with targeted disabilities also increased since the start of the fiscal year. Among all hires, people with targeted disabilities represent 3.66 percent, 0.66 percentage points above the Secretary’s 3 percent hiring goal. Let’s keep up the good work, VA!

For more information, contact ODI’s Workforce Analysis Team at odi@va.gov.

*Relevant Civilian Labor Force (RCLF) reflects all U.S. Citizens 16 years of age or over, excluding those in Armed Forces, who are employed in or actively seeking employment in VA specific occupations. This is based on the 2010 Census and does include Puerto Rico. The RCLF seen here is based on the end of FY13.

**Civilian Labor Force (CLF) consists of all U.S. Citizens 16 years of age or over, excluding those in Armed Forces, who are employed or seeking employment. The CLF contains all occupations and is an accurate comparative basis for Federal Government-wide comparison, the largest employer in the U.S. with all occupations represented. This is based on the 2010 Census which is shown to be a higher benchmark compared with the 2000 Census. The CLF does not include Puerto Rico.
D&I Online

The mission of the Department of Veterans Affairs’ diversity and inclusion program is to develop and implement a comprehensive, integrated, and strategic focus on diversity and inclusion as key components of the Department’s human resources strategies. Here’s a sampling of online tools available at http://www.diversity.va.gov that can help leverage diversity and build inclusion:

► Observance resources.
► Training resources, guides, and reports.
► Links to professional and community organizations.
► Best practices for diversity management.

D&I In Your E-mail Inbox

ODI sends out NewsLink, an e-mail message with annotated links to current news items and other information related to leveraging diversity and building inclusion. For a FREE subscription to this electronic news service, e-mail odi@va.gov with the words SUBSCRIBE NEWSLINK in the subject line. Find a sample of NewsLink at http://www.diversity.va.gov/products/newslink.aspx.

D&I on Your TV or PC


April 2014 Calendar

http://www.diversity.va.gov/calendar

National Minority Health Month
April 1

National Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month
April 1–30

19th Annual National Capitol Forum on Hispanic Higher Education
April 7–8; Washington, DC
http://www.hacu.net

National Equal Pay Day
April 8

LGBT Inclusion in the Federal Workplace Roundtable
April 8, 10 am to noon; Washington, DC
https://max.omb.gov/community/x/WoSBKg

National Day of Silence
April 11

Pan American Day
April 14

Pan American Week
April 13–19

Hispanic Council on Federal Employment Meeting
April 17, 2 to 4 p.m.; Washington, DC
https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2014/02/12/2014-02989/hispanic-council-on-federal-employment

Administrative Professionals Day
April 23

Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day
April 24

Gathering of Nations Powwow
April 24–26; Albuquerque, NM
http://www.gatheringofnations.com

Holocaust Remembrance Day
April 27–28

Holocaust Remembrance Week
April 27–May 4

Hispanic/Latino Professionals Association Job Fair
April 30; Landover, MD
http://www.hlpa.com/washington