Message from the DAS

It is a historic time as our Nation commemorates the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Civil Rights Act. This landmark legislation, signed by President Lyndon Baines Johnson in 1964, was the fruition of the lifelong work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and so many he inspired. This preeminent law prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin and sex, and serves as the foundation of our work in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI). We are proud to continue this journey of ensuring full equity, diversity, and inclusion in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

To that end, this May VA joins the Nation in honoring Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month and Jewish American Heritage Month. The Federal Inter-Agency Holocaust Remembrance Program is being held on May 7 in Washington, DC. Visit http://holocaustremembrance.org for more information and read more about some of these observances in this newsletter.

ODI and the VA Diversity Council are accepting nominations for the Secretary’s Annual Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Awards. These awards recognize exemplary contributions by VA managers/supervisors, employees, and teams who work to create a diverse VA workforce and cultivate an inclusive VA workplace. I encourage you to review the Information on how to submit a nomination at http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/sec-awards.aspx. Continued on the next page.

Commemorate
Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month

VA joins the Nation in commemorating Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month during the month of May. This year’s theme, “Diverse Leadership and Expanding Opportunity: An Imperative for America,” reflects the critical role of diverse leadership in the American multi-cultural mosaic and the contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. AAPI Heritage Month recognizes the vast contributions made by AAPI to our culture and our Nation.

As of September 30, 2013, AAPIs represented 7.36 percent (24,770) employees of VA’s workforce. VA employs 108,319 Veterans, of which 3.17 percent (3,429) are AAPIs. VA is experiencing less than expected participation for Asian males when compared to the Relevant Civilian Labor Force. In addition, AAPI men and women have less than expected participation rate at the GS 12–14 and SES/Title 38 equivalent pay grades when compared to the pay grade distribution of the total workforce. Continued on page 6.
DAS Message

Continued from Previous Page

ODI recently submitted the VA Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Program Status Report for fiscal year (FY) 2013 and EEO Plan for FY 2014. This report presents VA’s status on the six essential elements for a model EEO program as established by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s Management Directive (MD) 715. It also analyzes the VA workforce by race, ethnicity, gender and disability status; identifies potential barriers to EEO; and presents action plans to eliminate those barriers. For the first time, the MD 715 analytical tables are based on 2010 Census Civilian Labor Force figures and include U.S. citizens only. The VA report will be posted online soon at http://www.diversity.va.gov/products/reports.aspx. We encourage you to view the report to see the accomplishments as well as the challenges that remain in our collective effort to build a diverse and inclusive workforce in VA. ~Georgia Coffey, VA Deputy Assistant Secretary for Diversity and Inclusion

VACO Notes

Farewell!

ODI wishes a fond farewell to Carolyn Williams, Diversity Training Specialist with ODI’s Training and Communications Team, who has retired. Congratulations, Ms. Williams!

Welcome, New ODI Employees!

ODI welcomes new employees Mr. Sterling Akins and Ms. Dionn Henderson.

Mr. Sterling Akins serves as an Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Specialist on the Outreach and Retention Team in ODI. Mr. Akins was previously the Family Readiness Support Assistant and EEO Liaison for the 168th Multifunctional Medical Battalion, Camp Walker (Republic of Korea). Mr. Akins received numerous awards recognizing his outstanding work and services he had provided on behalf of the Department of Defense (DoD) and communities overseas. Mr. Akins is a 2003 graduate of the Thurgood Marshall School of Law where he was awarded his Juris Doctorate. In 1999, he earned his M.A., with honors, in Sociology from Texas Southern University. Mr. Akins is a 1992 graduate of Rutgers University where he received his dual degrees in Sociology and English. Mr. Akins has held a variety of rewarding positions in government service. His previous stints also include the Department of Veterans Affairs in Columbia, South Carolina, where he served as a Legal Administrative Specialist from 2008-2009, and the Small Business Administration, in Forth Worth, Texas, where he served as a Paralegal/Case Manager from 2006-2007. Prior to entering Federal Civil Service, Mr. Akins had served in a number of legal positions with various law firms since 2000. Welcome, Mr. Akins!

Ms. Dionn Henderson also serves as an EEO Specialist on the Outreach and Retention Team in ODI. A native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Ms. Henderson previously served as the DLA Distribution Susquehanna, Pennsylvania, Equal Employment Opportunity Specialist after retiring from the United States Navy with 21 years of active duty service. During her military career, Ms. Henderson served the majority of her career as a Personnel Specialist completing various assignments in support and administration of the Navy Reserve program. For her last six years of active duty she served as a Program Manager of the Equal Opportunity Program. Ms. Henderson is currently certified as a Senior Professional in Human Resources and a Department of Defense mediator. She received an Associate Degree in Business Administration and is working towards her Bachelor’s Degree in Business Management with a minor in Human Resources from the University of Maryland College (UMUC). Her personal awards include the Superior Civilian Service Award, Meritorious Service Medal, Navy and Marine Commendation Medal; Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal; and other personal, unit, and campaign awards. Welcome, Ms. Henderson!
Training

Cultural Competence and Your Career at VA

Course #3866746, “Cultural Competence and Your Career at VA”, is now accessible on the VA Learning University’s Talent Management System. This foundational-level, web-based course provides learners with a general awareness comprehension of the concepts of workforce diversity and workplace inclusion. It defines cultural competence and explains why these concepts are becoming increasingly important in the workplace. This course provides a description of why cultural competence is a strategic skill for VA and how cultural competence can enhance your career. It provides participants with information and tools to encourage them to reflect on their cultural group(s) and biases. It presents several dimensions of diversity, and how they play out in the workplace. It also describes attitudes and approaches that will help employees use this knowledge effectively in VA workplace. The course provides sources of information for learning more about other cultures that are represented at VA. The participant is presented with follow-on steps that they can take to help remove barriers to culturally competent service and to find common ground when conflict arises. Lastly, it provides motivational content encouraging the learner to begin the journey toward cultural competence. For more information, contact James Blockwood, Chief, Diversity Learning & Development, ODI, at James.Blockwood@va.gov.

Diversity News: Online Training


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

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.

SAIGE Conference

The Society of American Indian Government Employees (SAIGE) will hold its 11th Annual National Training Program (NTP) June 9-13, 2014, in Albuquerque, New Mexico. This year’s theme is “Native Pride and Spirit: Yesterday, Today and Forever.” The SAIGE NTP qualifies as training in compliance with 5 U.S.C. Chapter 41 and is open to all Federal employees and Veterans. SAIGE hosts a week-long annual national training program which focuses on professional development, leadership and topics that are integral to the highly complex relationship known as the Federal Indian Trust Responsibility. As part of this program, SAIGE offers special training sessions for Veterans, Youth, and a Federal Indian Law Course. Additionally, cultural events are presented by local native people. All attendees must follow appropriate conference attendance approval procedures established for their respective organizations. Costs and registration associated with attending the NTP must be authorized and coordinated by your organization. Additional information is available at http://www.saige.org. Prior to registering, you must receive appropriate approvals, including travel approval, from your organization. Contact Aurelia Waters, American Indian Alaska Native Employment Program Manager, ODI, at (202) 461-4124 or Aurelia.Waters@va.gov for more information.
Imagine this. You wake up in the morning and you have a clear sense of where you are going. Not necessarily for the day, but in life. You often assess the person you are today and work toward the goals you set for the future, both at work and at home. You may not know exactly how to reach your goals, but you know how to connect with the people and the tools that can help you along the way. When you understand and work with the forces that influence your life and career, we call this Personal Mastery.

VA recognizes the value of encouraging employees in the lifelong pursuit of Personal Mastery. It is for this reason that the VA Learning University recognizes the Personal Mastery competency in the All-Employee Competency Model. What does this mean for you? It means that no matter what your professional background, you have access to a roadmap that can help you think about how you own and manage your career. VA’s Personal Mastery competency has five different proficiency levels—novice, foundational, intermediate, advanced, and expert. By assessing your proficiency with Personal Mastery, you can create your own plan for becoming an expert in self-development.

Step 1 – Novice

Take a minute to recall the old proverb, “Know Thyself.” This is the heart of the novice level within Personal Mastery. As a novice you need to know your own strengths and weaknesses by listening to feedback from others. As a novice, you seek guidance and direction. Therefore, you often wait to be told what training courses to take or what jobs to explore. It is important for you to move away from reacting to information and to start proactively finding ways to learn more about your strengths and weaknesses.

Step 2 – Foundational

When you achieve foundational proficiency, you seek out guidance for self-development and career advancement. You can see areas for improvement and begin to close those gaps by creating an Individual Development Plan (IDP). At this proficiency level, you are more proactive and start to connect with people and the resources you need to learn and grow.

Step 3 – Intermediate

At the intermediate level, you actively participate in self-development and career advancement opportunities. You proactively take advantage of VA’s TMS course offerings to expand your skills and are checking back often for new resources. You aren’t waiting to be told which training courses to take. Rather, you know how to close gaps in your knowledge by seeking out learning opportunities. At the intermediate proficiency level, you also regularly ask for feedback and apply past experiences to improve performance.

Step 4 – Advanced

At the advanced level, you are already skilled at managing your own personal growth and are now also encouraging others to participate in learning opportunities. You initiate career development conversations and work with others to help them set developmental goals. You are passionate about VA and the talented people who work here and as a result seek out mentoring or coaching opportunities. You may decide to do this through local programs or join the MyCareer@VA Super User Program to help others connect with the tools and resources they need to own their careers.

Step 5 – Expert

As an expert, you may not have all the answers, but you know how to find them. At this level, you are constantly seeking innovative ways to develop yourself and others. You are a champion for VA and our important mission. Therefore, you work hard to expand the knowledge and skills of VA’s employees. Continued on page 9.
VBA Pilot Study

Correlating Diversity and Inclusion with Organizational Performance

How does one define the extant face of a globalized, 21st century labor force? In the simplest of terms, it is a workforce grounded on the premise of equal opportunity, where everyone is treated with respect, where inherent differences are embraced, where diverse talents are accepted and customarily applied on the job, and where performance is improved because of the integration of diversity and inclusion within workplace milieus. The implications for attaining a diverse and inclusive workforce are significant, not only for the morale of an organization’s personnel but also for an agency’s ability to yield quality output. Leveraging diversity and inclusion suggests heightened levels of productivity, because employee satisfaction levels are positive, and strengthens the efficacy of public service because employees feel empowered to contribute to the respective organizational missions.

While this type of advantageous working environment has been widely achieved across private sector organizations, the extent to which the Federal government has fostered such has yet to be determined. More specifically, it is imperative to know if VA echelons are attaining a diverse and inclusive labor force and performing at their highest potential levels as a direct result. More than ever, the business case for engendering and retaining a diverse and inclusive workforce is paramount, especially when we report the return on investment.

Given the dearth of diversity and inclusion metrics and organizational performance data within Federal agencies, the Workforce Analysis team at the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) has launched a pilot study within VA. The research team will utilize Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) metrics as the primary sample, from which baseline data for testing the aforementioned hypothesis will ultimately be ascertained. Out of consideration for the nascent status of this project, VBA has generously allotted ODI with three empirical, pragmatic sets of data to analyze: National Call Center, Pension Call Center, and Education Call Center. Performance metrics from said call centers, such as average wait times, client satisfaction scores, and overall service quality, will be measured in conjunction with diversity and inclusion indicators associated with them. To statistically investigate the relational strength and variability between diversity and inclusion and organizational performance, correlational and regression analyses will be employed, respectively.

The results of this project will be assiduously regarded and implemented in ways that will transform the efficaciousness of VA services, promulgate the business case for a diverse and inclusive workforce, and galvanize the quality care of VA Veterans. For inquiries regarding the details of this research study, or to obtain general information, contact David Williams, Director of Workforce Analysis, ODI, at David.Williams6@va.gov, or Sarah Scott, Workforce Analyst, ODI, at Sarah.Scott7@va.gov.

References


Policy Alert

Position Description/Functional Statement Development, Risk and Position Sensitivity Level Designations and Codes in PAID

HR Officers and other HR Professionals must be informed of the mandatory requirement to ensure that position sensitivity designation determinations are made for all position descriptions for Title 5 occupations and functional statements for all Title 38 (full and hybrid) occupations prior to filling the position or posting the job opportunity announcement. Ensuring that the proper level of designation is made is a shared responsibility between HR officials and the hiring managers. Refer to the attached Human Resources Management Letter (HRML) No. 05-14-02. The HRML is published on the OHRM web site. In addition, HR Officers and HR professionals must ensure that position sensitivity designations are properly and timely coded into the PAID system for all type of appointments. Refer to HRIS Bulletin No. 14-06. HR Officers must forward the HRML and Bulletin to Hiring Managers responsible for determining position sensitivity designation, HR Specialists responsible for coding the OF-8 Position Description Coversheet and Functional Statement; and HR Personnel responsible for processing and coding personnel actions in PAID; and must conduct in-service briefings with all to ensure they are made aware of the reporting OHRM requirements. Questions regarding the development of position descriptions or functional statements may be directed to the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM), Compensation and Classification Service at vacoclassif@va.gov. Questions regarding the risk and position sensitivity level designations and the PDAT may be directed to Trish Moore, Acting Director, Personnel Security and Suitability Service at (202) 461-5240 or Trish.Moore@va.gov. Questions regarding coding in PAID or PAID reports may be directed to Human Resources Information Service at (202) 461-7942 or vacohrispaid@va.gov.

Commemorate

Continued from Page 1

VA will continue to develop and implement strategies to improve outreach and career development programs and ensure that all employees, including members of groups with less than expected participation, are encouraged to apply.

All managers and supervisors are encouraged to support attendance at events and activities to recognize and honor the contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. VA will continue to lead the effort to create a diverse, results-oriented, high-performing workforce that reflects the communities we serve and the diversity of our Nation. By eliminating barriers to equal opportunity and cultivating an inclusive work environment, all employees can realize their full potential and VA can provide the best possible service to our Nation’s heroes—our Veterans.

For additional information on VA’s AAPI Program, contact Andy Gonzalez, VA’s National AAPI Program Manager, ODI, at (202) 299-4320 or Andy.Gonzalez@va.gov or visit the AAPI Program Web site at http://www.diversity.va.gov/programs/aapi.aspx.

VACO AAPI Observance

Please join the Asian Pacific American Heritage Month Committee on Thursday, May, 15, 2014, as VA Central Office commemorates Asian Pacific American Heritage Month in the G.V. “Sonny” Montgomery Veterans Conference Center, Room 230 at noon. Mr. Dat Tran, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Data Governance and Analysis will serve as the senior host. The featured keynote speaker will be Major Sharon K. G. Dunbar, Commander of the Air Force District of Washington and the 320th Air Expeditionary Wing. Major Dunbar will speak on this year’s National Theme: “Diverse Leadership + Expanding Opportunity: An Imperative for America.” This event is sponsored by the Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

For additional information, contact Tynnetta Lee, Special Emphasis Observance Coordinator at (202) 461-7968 or Tynnetta.Lee@va.gov. Continued on the next page.
Jewish American Heritage Month

VA also joins the Nation in observing Jewish American Heritage Month in May. From the 2013 Presidential Proclamation (http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/04/30/presidential-proclamation-jewish-american-heritage-month-2013): In his second year in office, President George Washington wrote a letter to the Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island—one of our Nation’s first Jewish houses of worship—and reaffirmed our country’s commitment to religious freedom. He noted that the Government of the United States would give “to bigotry no sanction [and] to persecution no assistance,” and that all Americans are entitled to “liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship.” Those words ring as true today as they did then, and they speak to a principle as old as America itself: that no matter who you are, where you come from, or what faith you practice, all of us have an equal share in America’s promise.

It was such a belief that drew generations of Jewish immigrants to our shores. It is what brought Jewish families westward when pogroms and persecution cast a shadow over Europe in the last century. It is what led Holocaust survivors and Jews trapped behind the Iron Curtain to rebuild their lives across the Atlantic. And with every group that arrived here, the Jewish American community grew stronger. Our Nation grew stronger. Jewish immigrants from all over the world wove new threads into our cultural fabric with rich traditions and indomitable faith, and their descendants pioneered incredible advances in science and the arts. Teachings from the Torah lit the way toward a more perfect Union, from women’s rights to workers’ rights to the end of segregation.

That story is still unfolding today. Jewish Americans continue to guide our country’s progress as scientists and teachers, public servants and private citizens, wise leaders and loving parents. We see their accomplishments in every neighborhood, and we see them abroad in our unbreakable bond with Israel that Jewish Americans helped forge. More than 350 years have passed since Jewish refugees first made landfall on American shores. We take this month to celebrate the progress that followed, and the bright future that lies ahead.

National Mental Health Awareness Month

VA also joins the Nation in observing the month of May as National Mental Health Awareness Month. From the 2013 Presidential Proclamation (http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/04/30/presidential-proclamation-national-mental-health-awareness-month-2013): Today, tens of millions of Americans are living with the burden of a mental health problem. They shoulder conditions like depression and anxiety, post-traumatic stress and bipolar disorder—debilitating illnesses that can strain every part of a person’s life. And even though help is out there, less than half of children and adults with diagnosable mental health problems receive treatment. During National Mental Health Awareness Month, we shine a light on these issues, stand with men and women in need, and redouble our efforts to address mental health problems in America.

For many, getting help starts with a conversation. People who believe they may be suffering from a mental health condition should talk about it with someone they trust and consult a health care provider. As a Nation, it is up to all of us to know the signs of mental health issues and lend a hand to those who are struggling. Shame and stigma too often leave people feeling like there is no place to turn. We need to make sure they know that asking for help is not a sign of weakness—it is a sign of strength. To find treatment services nearby, call 1-800-662-HELP. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline offers immediate assistance for all Americans, including service members and veterans, at 1-800-273-TALK.

Our commitment cannot end there...We have made unprecedented commitments to improving mental health care for veterans suffering from traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder. And we have proposed new funding for mental health programs that will help teachers and other adults recognize the signs of mental illness in children, improve mental health outcomes for young people, and train 5,000 more mental health professionals to serve our youth...Mental health problems remain a serious public health concern, but together, our Nation is making progress. Continued on the next page.
Older Americans Month

Additionally, VA joins the Nation in observing Older Americans Month in May. From the 2013 Presidential Proclamation (http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/04/30/presidential-proclamation-older-americans-month-2013): For half a century, communities in every corner of our country have come together to honor older Americans in a special way during the month of May. We carry that tradition forward again this year by recognizing their accomplishments, sharing their stories, and showing support and appreciation for our elders.

With groundbreaking advances in medicine and health care, Americans are living longer and achieving more. Many seniors are using a lifetime of experience to serve those around them. Even after decades of hard work, men and women are taking on new roles after retirement—organizing, educating, innovating, and making sure they leave the next generation with the same opportunities they had. It is a commitment that shines brightly in programs like Senior Corps, which connects more than half a million people to service opportunities from coast to coast...Our seniors deserve the best our country has to offer. This month, we pay tribute to the men and women who raised us, and we pledge anew to show them the fullest care, support, and respect of a grateful Nation.

National Day of Prayer

VA joins the Nation in observing the National Day of Prayer on May 1, 2014. From the 2013 Presidential Proclamation (http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/01/presidential-proclamation-national-day-prayer-2013): Americans have long turned to prayer both in times of joy and times of sorrow. On their voyage to the New World, the earliest settlers prayed that they would “rejoice together, mourn together, labor, and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work.” From that day forward, Americans have prayed as a means of uniting, guiding, and healing. In times of hardship and tragedy, and in periods of peace and prosperity, prayer has provided reassurance, sustenance, and affirmation of common purpose.

Prayer brings communities together and can be a wellspring of strength and support. In the aftermath of senseless acts of violence, the prayers of countless Americans signal to grieving families and a suffering community that they are not alone. Their pain is a shared pain, and their hope a shared hope. Regardless of religion or creed, Americans reflect on the sacredness of life and express their sympathy for the wounded, offering comfort and holding up a light in an hour of darkness.

All of us have the freedom to pray and exercise our faiths openly. Our laws protect these God-given liberties, and rightly so. Today and every day, prayers will be offered in houses of worship, at community gatherings, in our homes, and in neighborhoods all across our country. Let us give thanks for the freedom to practice our faith as we see fit, whether individually or in fellowship...

The Congress, by Public Law 100-307, as amended, has called on the President to issue each year a proclamation designating the first Thursday in May as a "National Day of Prayer."

Military Spouse Appreciation Day

VA joins the Nation in commemorating Military Spouse Appreciation Day on May 9, 2014. From the 2013 Presidential Proclamation (http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/09/presidential-proclamation-military-spouse-appreciation-day-2013): As long as there have been courageous men and women willing to protect our Union and our ideals, there have been extraordinary spouses at their side—patriots in their own right who serve and sacrifice in ways many cannot fathom. They are moms and dads who take up the work of two during deployments, shuffling their careers and packing up their lives whenever our Nation calls. They are dedicated employees at our businesses, committed volunteers in our communities, and essential caretakers for our wounded warriors. Continued on the next page.
What’s more, you also champion coaching and mentoring activities to create a culture of continuous learning.

Making a commitment to growing yourself and others is good for you and for VA. VA created the Personal Mastery competency to provide you with a straightforward way to think about career development. When you take charge of your career, you can create the future you want for yourself. This encourages you to bring the very best of who you are to work so that your pride and purpose can serve Veterans and their families.

Are you ready to become a self-development expert?

Have other career development questions? VA offers many resources to help you in your career development, so be sure to check out MyCareer@VA and the VA Learning University for more training and other career development information.

America’s military spouses are at the core of our Armed Forces, and on Military Spouse Appreciation Day, we celebrate their contributions to keeping our country safe.

Just as we are bound by a sacred obligation to care for our men and women in uniform, we are equally responsible for making sure their loved ones get the support they deserve...Through First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden’s Joining Forces initiative, we have partnered with the private sector to expand hiring for military spouses and veterans.

We have also called on States to streamline credentialing and licensing procedures that hinder too many military spouses when they move from duty station to duty station. Military spouses with professional experience should not have to wait for work, and our businesses should not have to go without their skills. By simplifying the certification process, we can help ensure the financial stability of our military families, strengthen our Armed Forces, and spur growth throughout our economy. To learn more and get involved, visit www.JoiningForces.gov.

In the past few years, we have seen every part of our society come together and make a real commitment to supporting our military families—not just with words, but with deeds. Yet, we must do more to honor the profound debt of gratitude we owe our military spouses. Their strength and resolve reflects the best of the American spirit, and on this occasion, let us pledge once more to serve them as well as they serve us.

National Women’s Health Week

VA joins the Nation in commemorating National Women’s Health Week May 11–17, 2014. From the 2013 Presidential Proclamation (http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/10/presidential-proclamation-national-womens-health-week-2013): Since our Nation’s founding, women have given their all to expanding opportunity for their families and for future generations. Decade after decade, that fierce dedication has been rewarded with remarkable progress in nearly every part of society; yet all too often, advances in women’s health and well-being have lagged behind. During National Women’s Health Week, we recommit to changing that reality and increasing access to health services that help women and girls get the care they need…

This week, as we reflect on how far we have come in the fight to provide Americans with the care they deserve, let us renew our commitment to empowering all women with the chance to live strong, healthy lives.
Compliance Corner

Social Media and the EEO Process

According to a recent decision by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), use of personal social media accounts could be part of an employee’s workplace harassment complaint. Even if employees post harassing or derogatory information about coworkers away from the workplace, for example, an employer may be liable for a hostile work environment if it was aware of the postings, or if the harassing employee was using employer-owned devices or accounts.

Here are the facts—an air traffic controller alleged that he was subjected to a hostile work environment based on his race and sex, and in reprisal for his prior protected EEO activity. He stated that after making an office “food run” to Chick-fil-A, one of his co-workers posted on Facebook that “he [emphasis added] ‘would make the next food run to a racist restaurant and see if his Black a** wants to complain. If he does, I will laugh in his face.’” Complainant, who did not have a Facebook page, apparently heard about the posting and, although he never discussed it with the alleged harasser, it was later “inferred” that the harasser was upset about the choice of Chi[ck]-fil-A...because “it is allegedly an anti-gay establishment.” Complainant also alleged that after this Facebook posting, he began a period in which he was “uncomfortable” in the workplace. Separately, Complainant asserted that his regular agency trainer (who was friendly with the alleged harasser) reassigned Complainant to a new trainer under whom Complainant “struggled” and was “hounded” and “mocked.”

The agency dismissed this complaint for failing to state a claim, but, on appeal, the EEOC reversed. The EEOC stated that, if all of Complainant’s allegations were considered together, they “are reflective of an actionable claim of harassment” and that Complainant stated a cognizable claim. This case is significant because it acknowledges that a social media posting by a co-worker may contribute to the creation of an unlawful hostile work environment. However, since this is a procedural decision, the facts only reflect the initial allegations.

In another recent federal sector case, the EEOC weighed in on the use of social media by federal agencies to advertise positions. The Complainant alleged that she was not selected for a Park Ranger position due to her age (61) and sex (female). Complainant asserted that the agency’s recruitment of younger people for this position through Facebook and other social media put older workers at a disadvantage. She alleged that because older workers use computers less often than younger people, using social media to advertise vacancies had a disparate impact on workers protected by the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA). The EEOC determined that the Complainant failed to put forth evidence of disparate impact based on her age or a preference for younger applicants linked to the agency using social media for recruitment. ~Maxanne R. Witkin, Director, VA’s Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication

For more information about OEDCA, visit http://www.oedca.va.gov.

Diversity Council

Next Meeting May 14

The next VA Diversity Council (VADC) quarterly meeting was rescheduled from Wednesday, April 16, 2014, to Wednesday, May 14, 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.
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:

► Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month and other 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


May 2014 Calendar

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

Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month
Jewish American Heritage Month
National Mental Health Awareness Month
Older Americans Month

May Day/Lei Day/Beltane/National Day of Prayer
May 1

Flexible Work Arrangement Week
May 4–10

Cinco de Mayo
May 5

Federal Asian Pacific American Council
National Leadership Training Program
May 5–9; Charlotte, NC
http://www.fapac.org

Federal Inter-Agency Holocaust Remembrance Program
May 7; Washington, DC
http://holocaustremembrance.org