



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
WASHINGTON

December 11, 2001

MEMORANDUM TO MEMBERS OF VA'S NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL

SUBJECT: Partnership

Since my return to VA, I've heard a lot about VA's experience with labor-management partnerships. Both at the national, VISN, and local level, labor and management have worked together to implement improvements in service to veterans and employees.

As you are aware, the President recently issued Executive Order 13203 revoking Executive Order 12871 and a Presidential Memorandum dated October 28, 1999, which required the establishment of labor-management partnerships. In doing this, the President has allowed agency heads to adopt a labor relations program best suited to their needs, consistent with their collective bargaining agreements. This flexibility includes the option of continuing partnership arrangements, particularly if they are having positive results.

I find this to be the case in VA. While some partnership councils have struggled and in some cases have not yet formed, the partnership successes far outweigh the failures. Accordingly, I have decided to retain the National Partnership Council (NPC) as an advisory body to me and our leadership team.

In that capacity, I ask that you develop a new partnership agreement that I could sign. I would like you to review the accomplishments of the NPC over the last eight years and identify those critical success factors that produced positive results. You should also identify those barriers which interfered with your ability to bring about positive results and that may stand in the way today from realizing your full potential.

Your review should also include the Council's structure itself to include size and representation issues. Is the Council too big or too small? Do the union partners feel that there is adequate representation based on the size of the bargaining unit they represent or other such factors? Are the Council's objectives realistic and attainable? Is the purpose clear? These are but a few of the issues which may help the Council in fashioning a new agreement.

Finally, I ask that you develop a Labor-Management Awards Program so that I might recognize collaborative efforts between labor and management that result in notable improvements in VA's performance.

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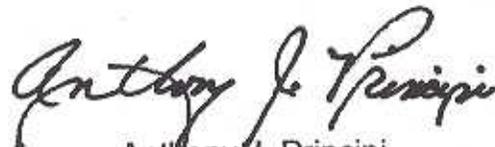
## Partnership

I have communicated my support for labor-management partnerships to my leadership team through the attached memorandum on the same subject. You will see that it addresses decisions I have made in related areas that flow from the requirements in Executive Order 13203.

With respect to the requirement that VA rescind regulations, guidelines, etc., that were used to implement partnership, I have asked the Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration to advise you of what documents need to be rescinded in whole or in part.

In addition, I have decided that managers will not be required to bargain over permissive areas such as numbers, types, and grades of positions and the technology we use to perform work. I believe that our dealings with labor on permissive areas should be done in partnership and not across a bargaining table. Management officials are accountable and bear enormous responsibility for making the right decision when it involves such issues as numbers, grades, types of positions, and the technology used in performing work. Nonetheless, I do expect that they will engage labor in a full discussion and exchange of views before making a final decision.

I am confident that what will emerge from strengthening our partnership arrangements and working more effectively together will be a better VA, more capable than ever in delivering high quality service in a timely and cost effective manner, while at the same time creating a very positive and supportive work environment for our valued employees. I look forward to working with you as we pursue these common goals.

  
Anthony J. Principi

Attachment