

# **ORM NEWS**

**From the Office of the Deputy Assistant  
Secretary for Resolution Management  
Department of Veterans Affairs**



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November 2001

*From the Deputy Assistant Secretary*

As we approach what is often referred to as the “Holiday Season”, please keep in mind that in our nation there is a great diversity of cultures. We should always be mindful that we should respect everyone’s culture, celebrations, holidays, and observances.

This is also a time of great opportunity to learn about other cultures. I believe that learning about other cultures not only broadens us individually, it also strengthens us as a community.

This year is unlike any that many of us have experienced. Others have experienced times of tremendous change in their daily lives. One constant for all of us is the recognition that, even in times of great challenges to ourselves, we can make a difference in the lives of others by reaching out and giving them our support.

The Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) is a means by which each of us can help others. I encourage each of you to consider CFC as a means to make a contribution to those in need in our diverse culture. The need exists.

**We can help!**

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**James S. Jones**

## Highlights of Regulations and Programs

### **Employment Discrimination Based on Religion, Ethnicity, or Country of Origin**

Anger at those responsible for the tragic events of September 11 should not be misdirected against innocent individuals because of their religion, ethnicity, or country of origin. Employers and labor unions have a special role in guarding against unlawful workplace discrimination.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits workplace discrimination based on religion, national origin, race, color, or sex. At this time, employers and unions should be particularly sensitive to potential discrimination or harassment against individuals who are - or are perceived to be - Muslim, Arab, Afghani, Middle Eastern, or South Asian (Pakistani, Indian, etc.).

The law's prohibitions include harassment or any other employment action based on any of the following:

- **Affiliation:** Harassing or otherwise discriminating because an individual is affiliated with a particular religious or ethnic group. For example, harassing an individual because she is Arab or practices Islam, or paying an employee less because she is Middle Eastern.
- **Physical or cultural traits and clothing:** Harassing or otherwise discriminating because of physical, cultural, or linguistic characteristics, such as accent or dress associated with a particular religion, ethnicity, or country of origin. For example, harassing a woman wearing a hijab (a body covering and/or head-scarf worn by some Muslims), or not hiring a man with a dark complexion and an accent believed to be Arab.
- **Perception:** Harassing or otherwise discriminating because of the perception or belief that a person is a member of a particular racial, national origin, or religious group whether or not that perception is correct. For example, failing to hire an Hispanic person because the hiring official believed that he was from Pakistan, or harassing a Sikh man wearing a turban because the harasser thought he was Muslim.
- **Association:** Harassing or otherwise discriminating because of an individual's association with a person or organization of a particular religion or ethnicity. For example, harassing an employee whose husband is from Afghanistan, or refusing to promote an employee because he attends a mosque.

## Harassment

Employers must provide a workplace that is free of harassment based on national origin, ethnicity, or religion. They may be liable not only for harassment by supervisors, but also by coworkers or by non-employees under their control. Employers should clearly communicate to all employees - through a written policy or other appropriate mechanism - that harassment such as ethnic slurs or other verbal or physical conduct directed toward any racial, ethnic, or religious group is prohibited and that employees must respect the rights of their coworkers. An employer also should have effective and clearly communicated policies and procedures for addressing complaints of harassment and should train managers on how to identify and respond effectively to harassment even in the absence of a complaint.

## Religious Accommodation

Title VII requires an employer to reasonably accommodate the religious practices of an employee or prospective employee, unless doing so would create an undue hardship for the employer. Some reasonable religious accommodations that employers may be required to provide workers include leave for religious observances, time and/or place to pray, and ability to wear religious garb.

## Office of Special Counsel (OSC) Requires Use of Form for Filing Complaints

The Office of Special Counsel (OSC) revised its regulations at 5 CFR Part 1800 on filing complaints and disclosures. The revised regulation requires the use of **Form OSC-11** to file a complaint of prohibited personnel practice or other prohibited activity (other than a complaint alleging only a Hatch Act violation).

OSC is an independent federal investigative and prosecutorial agency. OSC's primary mission is

to safeguard the merit system by protecting federal employees and applicants from prohibited personnel practices, especially reprisal for whistleblowing. OSC also protects the rights of federal employee military veterans and reservists under the Uniform Service Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994.

For more information on OSC click on [www.osc.gov](http://www.osc.gov). To obtain a copy of Form OSC-11 click on [www.osc.gov/documents/osc11.pdf](http://www.osc.gov/documents/osc11.pdf)

## **Core Competencies for Occupations in ORM**

A study conducted by Booz-Allen and Hamilton identified core competencies for each occupational series in ORM. These core competencies will play an important role as we implement ORM's Integrated Business Plan (IBP). The results of this study have been posted on the Human Resources site of ORM's intranet website. The following link may be used to access the core competencies. I encourage each ORM employee to review these important core competencies.

<http://vaww.va.gov/orm/HR.htm>

John D. Sampson  
ORM HR Specialist

## **Reporting Travel Expenses from Non-federal Sources**

The Office of Government Ethics (OGE) requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to report all instances when VA employees accept payment of more than \$250 for travel expenses from a **non-federal source**. Travel paid by non-profit organizations and by other government agencies are not subject to this reporting requirement. Employees who accept these payments should report this to your Field Manager.

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## **Citibank Visa Update-Late Payments**

- ❑ An account is suspended, if it is 36-89 days past due. If a payment has been received during this timeframe, account may be reactivated.
- ❑ An account goes into pre-cancellation when it is 90-100 days past due.
- ❑ An account is cancelled when it is 101 plus days past due.
- ❑ Accounts go to collection, when they are in a suspended status.

For more information contact Barbara Scott at (202) 501- 2817 or by e-mail.

## What's Happening in the Field?

### Bedford Field Office

Bedford ORM gave **Charlene Jones** a gala send off, celebrating her move from Bedford to Bay Pines Learning Resources. Mrs. Jones was treated to lunch and gifts such as a blanket depicting scenes of Concord, Maine's history and a collage of photographs.

November birthday babies will be celebrated: Linda Wilson and Susan Epting! Shoosh! We won't tell the number!!

The Bedford ORM Field Office is called upon annually to support training efforts for the VISN 1 Education Center's newly hired or promoted supervisors. The ORM component of this Supervisory Leadership Training is to raise awareness of pitfalls that can lead to employee complaints of discrimination.

Investigator **Karen Kubik** has been teaching the course for three years and recently completed the 2001 training module. Classes grow each year with nearly 30 new supervisors in attendance this year. The training session is a three-week commitment by attendees over the course of a six-month period.

The portion on ORM, presented by Mrs. Kubik, focuses on several components: diversity, awareness, learning to recognize differences in people's values and group problem solving of discrimination issues.

During the awareness component, each attendee is asked to wear a label designating them as a particular ethnic, gender, religious, disabled or other group belonging to one of the eight protected bases of discrimination. With their label on the front, another blank sheet of poster board is attached to their backs. Each of the participants is then asked to walk around the room writing down the first thing that comes to mind when they read the label on the person's front label. Some of the answers are quite eye opening and the exercise prompts each person to look inside themselves to see how they might unknowingly discriminate against others. By doing this exercise the class is always surprised to see what their own and others' answers are to the labeling.

For instance, a white male in the audience may be labeled a black female. Another might be labeled Jewish or Amputee or Asian or Homosexual. One label is a male nurse and one is a blond female.

Answers given by each supervisor, written down quickly as first reactions are, of course, in some respects humorous but at the same time astounding, "I think this exercise and the workshop problem-solving give supervisors a chance to see how their own stereotyping tendencies can affect their workplace decisions," Mrs. Kubik said. "This learning module equips the class with information that can help them in confronting the possibility of discrimination in their workplaces."

Other components of the VISN 1 training session as it relates to ORM include an ADR and mediation overview and the EEO complaint process.

### Los Angeles Field Office

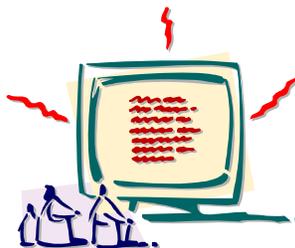
Congratulations go out to Ms. **Karen Civitate**, EEO Investigator at the Los Angeles ORM Field Office for completing the University of California Certificate Program in Conflict Management and the Use of Alternative Dispute Resolution. A student earning this certificate has taken a minimum of 158 hours of graded course work, demonstrating a high level of personal commitment to their professional development. With her accomplishment Karen will be able to contribute even more to ORM's mission and growth.

### Cleveland and Detroit ORM Offices

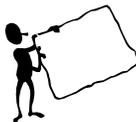
Congratulations are in order the Cleveland/Detroit ORM staff. 10 cases were resolved/withdrawn for the month of September 2001.

### Information Technology (IT) Office

The **Information Technology (IT) Office** headed by Reggie Ware is now co-located with the Office of the DAS, Office of Policy and Compliance, and the Washington Field Office at 1575 I (Eye) St., NW, Washington, D.C.



## Special Employee Announcements



### New Employees, Promotions, and Selections:

#### Office of the DAS

**Waltrunette Gardner** has been selected for the HR Manager position in the DAS's office effective 11/4/01.

#### Cleveland Field Office

The following individuals have been selected to join the Cleveland ORM staff in the near future:

**Denene Burnett** - Investigator

**Collette Hill** - Program Assistant

**James Jindra** - Investigator

**Daniel Prater** - Intake Specialist

#### Promotion:

Congratulations are in order for **Thurman Story** who has been promoted to Intake Specialist at the Cleveland ORM Field Office.

#### Information Technology (IT) Office

**Robert Green** is the newest member of the IT Staff.

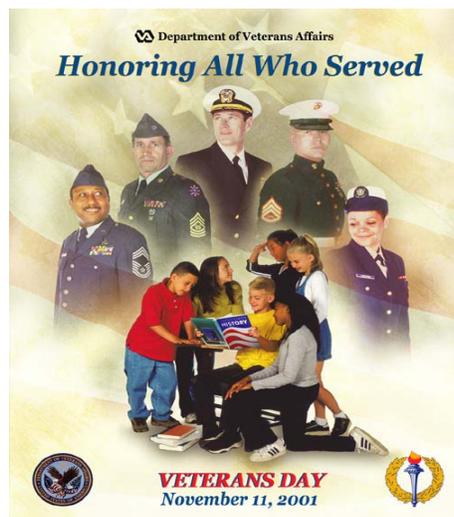
*Congratulations!*

A decorative graphic featuring the word 'Congratulations!' in a red, cursive font, underlined with a blue line. To the right of the text is a blue ribbon graphic with a white star at the top.

# Did You Know?

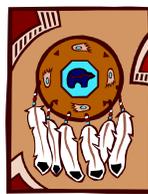


**National Veterans Awareness Week**  
(November 11 through November 17, 2001)  
For more information go to [www.va.gov/vetsday](http://www.va.gov/vetsday)



## American Indian Heritage Month

This year's theme is "Unity through Diversity"



For more information visit  
[www.va.gov/dmeee/programs/nativeamerican.htm](http://www.va.gov/dmeee/programs/nativeamerican.htm)

## **Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Open Season**

**November 12, 2001 through December 10, 2001**

**For more information go to the attached HR Link\$ newsletter "The Link"**



The LINK -October  
2001.doc

### **Congress Passes Treasury Postal Spending Bill**

**Congress passed the fiscal 2002 Treasury-Postal appropriations bill on November 1, 2001, leaving only a presidential signature between civil service employees and a 4.6 percent average pay raise in 2002.**

**The \$17.1 billion spending bill passed easily in the House on Wednesday with a 339 to 85 vote. Senators approved it 83 to 15 on Thursday and sent it to President Bush for his signature. The bill includes a 3.4 percent raise for members of Congress, which would raise the cap on Senior Executive Service salaries. SES salaries are tied to congressional salaries.**

### **How will changes in the Thrift Savings Plan impact your retirement savings?**

**The Open Season begins November 15th and it is crucial that both employees and retirees have first-hand, current knowledge of the TSP and the changes coming in the days ahead. Your Guide to the New Thrift Savings Plan is a must read for both current and new enrollees in the TSP and is available for shipping just in time for the open season. This guide is easy to read and is packed full of real-life examples, helpful charts and calculations. To learn more about this guide, go to**

**<http://www.FENDonline.com/B061.html>**

## CFC 2001



We want to take this opportunity to thank every employee who contributed to the CFC this year. Your contributions are deeply appreciated given the events of the past few months. The CFC is one of the clearest examples of how a community of individuals, federal employees, can work to together to make a major contribution to the welfare of others. Employees of the Office of the DAS, the Washington Field Office, and the Office of Policy and Compliance raised additional funds for the CFC by conducting a bake sale and craft auction. These funds are in addition to individual employee contributions from these offices. To everyone who made a contribution to the CFC, Thanks! "Caring is Sharing."



### ***Flu Season Peaks*** ***Tips for staying healthy***

- **Wash your hands frequently.** That goes for you to, Mom and Dad. It's not just kid stuff. Hands are one of the best vehicles for transmitting disease. And a once-through pass under the running water doesn't count. *Scrub them!*
- **Forget what Mother told you.** Use your arm, not your hands, to cover your mouth for a sneeze or cough.
- **Cloth towels and a washable bathroom cup may be EC (environmentally correct), but ...** switch to paper towels and disposable cups at least during the cold and flu season.
- **Mother WAS right about a good night's sleep and eating your spinach.** A well-rested body and a healthy diet, including foods rich in vitamin C, may just give you a fighting chance to beat the bug.
- **Plan ahead.** If you did get socked with the flu last year, remember how miserable you felt and promise to get a flu shot early this winter to protect yourself.

## **Reminders:**

- Click on ORM's Web site at <http://vaww.va.gov/orm> for the latest information on ORM programs, policies, and employee information.

**Remember! Assistance is available to ORM employees through our Employee Assistance Program with Green Spring Health Services. If you are in need of some type of counseling as a result of the recent terrorist activities, you are encouraged to call 1 (800) 523-5015. Employees in the DC Metro area can also call Linda Smith at (202) 273-5015.**

**For assistance with computer problems contact the ITS Help Desk at (202) 273-6676 or send an e-mail to [ORM.Help@orm.va.gov](mailto:ORM.Help@orm.va.gov)**

**Visit the EEOC Web site [www.eeoc.gov](http://www.eeoc.gov) for current information on EEOC programs, decisions and other information relevant to the EEO process.**

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