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VA Proposes, Takes Actions on Leaders at Veterans Benefits Administration

Also Announces Denver Replacement Hospital Administrative Investigation Board Results

WASHINGTON -- The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced actions against four leaders at the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and close-out of an Administrative Investigation Board (AIB) review of the Denver Hospital Replacement project.

Based on results of investigations VA proposed three actions and issued one action. These actions include:

- Danny Pummill, Acting Undersecretary for Benefits, received a proposed 15-day suspension. This action is based on his alleged lack of oversight regarding Ms. Rubens' and Ms. Graves' actions in connection with their relocations.
- Diana Rubens, Director, Philadelphia Regional Office, received a reprimand and a proposed 10-percent salary reduction. This action is based on her failure to exercise sound judgment by creating the appearance of impropriety in connection with her relocation.
- Kimberly Graves, Director, Minneapolis/St. Paul Regional Office, received a reprimand and a proposed 10-percent salary reduction. This action is based on her failure to exercise sound judgment by creating the appearance of impropriety in connection with her relocation.
- Additionally, Beth McCoy, Director, Field Operations, received a reprimand, based on her failure to exercise sound judgment by creating the appearance of impropriety in connection with her involvement in vacating the position to which she was then permanently assigned.

Mr. Pummill's action, if sustained, is appealable to a third party. Ms. Rubens' and Ms. Graves' pay reductions, if sustained, may be reviewed by the VA Secretary but may not be appealed to outside third parties. Reprimands may be grieved administratively but may not be appealed to outside third parties.

"When I learned that other evidence was available following the decisions of the Merit Systems Protection Board, I made a commitment to review all of the facts and take any additional accountability actions that I believed to be in the best interest of Veterans and taxpayers. That meant looking through an enormous amount of additional evidence," said Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson. "After my review of that evidence, I believe that, within the scope and intent of the law, additional accountability actions were warranted. We have already reinstated Diana Rubens and Kim Graves to their positions as Regional Office Directors and I have been encouraged by their immediate effort to get back to work. Ultimately, that is what these decisions are about: getting back to the work of serving America's Veterans."

VA also announced today that no additional adverse personnel actions will be taken as a result of the Administrative Investigative Board (AIB) review of the Denver Hospital Replacement project. If additional information comes to light when the Office of Inspector General completes its investigation regarding potential wrongdoing on the Denver replacement project, VA will look to take appropriate action at that time.

The AIB determined that responsibility for the decisions that resulted in delays and cost overruns for the Denver replacement facility rested with executives who had departed from the VA prior to the AIB's completion.

Also prior to the AIB's completion, the Department made personnel changes in other key positions for the project:

- The previous Project Executive was moved to a staff resident engineer position—a reassignment that resulted in a loss of grade and pay. The individual is no longer employed by VA.
- The previous Senior Resident Engineer was reassigned to non-supervisory work as a design manager—two new Senior Resident Engineers were hired in October 2014. The individual is also no longer employed by VA.
- The previous Senior Contracting Officer for Denver was removed from the project and reassigned to non-supervisory duties.

"We know that errors were made in the construction of the Denver replacement facility," said Gibson, who has visited the replacement facility site at least 10 times in the past year and a half. "We have owned those challenges and taken action to get the project back on track. We know that earning back the trust of Veterans in Colorado and across the nation means constructing a facility they will be proud of and making sure that these errors do not occur again. After reviewing thousands of pages of documentation, I determined that the evidence does not support accountability action against any individual still employed by VA. We have made many changes in the way we design, bid and construct facilities. We have appointed a new Principal Executive Director of the Office of Acquisition, Logistics and Construction, Mr. Greg Giddens, and we are working more closely with the Army Corps of Engineers than ever before. All of these process and personnel changes have made major reforms to the way we build, lease and buy space to best serve our Veterans and taxpayers."

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