

ROA calls for accountability following PACT Act “bonus blunder”

The Reserve Organization of America urges further accountability for the wrongful awarding of \$10.8 million in bonuses to VA Central Office Senior Executives.



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/EINPresswire.com/ -- On June 28, the Reserve Organization of America’s executive director retired Army Maj. Gen. Jeffrey E. Phillips wrote to Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough urging further accountability regarding the wrongful awarding of more than 10 million dollars in critical skill incentive payments to “nearly all” Veterans Health Administration and Veterans Benefits Administration central office senior executives.

“

Mr. Secretary, do these officials, all of whom bear for life the title “honorable,” still have your full confidence? They don’t have ours.”

ROA executive director, Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Jeffrey Phillips, U.S. Army

CSIs are a recruitment and retention tool intended for employees who “possess a high-demand skill or skill that is at a shortage” to implement the PACT Act, landmark legislation delivering life-saving healthcare and benefits to millions of toxic-exposed veterans.

On May 9, the VA’s Office of Inspector General published its [findings](#) that the awarding of CSIs approved by Under Secretary for Health Dr. Shereef Elnahal and Under Secretary for Benefits Joshua Jacobs to “nearly all” VHA and

VBA central office executives “lacked adequate justification and was inconsistent with the PACT Act and VA policy.”

Blame for this failure was also given to the VA’s general counsel and the assistant secretaries of Human Resources and Administration and Operations, Security, and Preparedness.

The OIG’s findings captured the attention of many lawmakers on Capitol Hill, including Rep. Mike Bost (IL-12), the chairman of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, who described the behavior as “criminal” at a [hearing](#) held on June 4.

"Mr. Secretary, do these officials, all of whom bear for life the title "honorable," still have your full confidence?" wrote Phillips in his letter to Secretary McDonough. "They don't have ours."

These failures notwithstanding, ROA thanked the Secretary for the actions he took upon the news of this wrongdoing reaching his desk.

"To your considerable credit, you notified Congress of this news upon discovery, cancelled and recouped more than 90 percent of the CSI payments made to VACO senior executives, and had the VA Inspector General review the matter. You even took responsibility before Congress to the actions of Dr. Elnahal and Mr. Jacobs," wrote Phillips.

With these officials still in their jobs and by now likely "moving on," as customarily occurs in the bureaucracy, ROA is nonetheless not as ready to move along.

This is why ROA is calling on Secretary McDonough to make public his professional assessment regarding whether Dr. Elnahal and Mr. Jacobs still have his trust and confidence and are worthy of the trust and confidence of our nation's veterans and the American people.

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