

HEARING TO CONSIDER PENDING NOMINATIONS

HEARING BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS UNITED STATES SENATE ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS FIRST SESSION

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HEARING TO CONSIDER PENDING NOMINATIONS

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 4, 2025

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 4:06 p.m., in Room SR-418, Russell Senate Office Building, Hon. Jerry Moran, Chairman of the Committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Moran, Tuberville, Blumenthal, Murray, Hirono, Hassan, King, and Duckworth.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JERRY MORAN, CHAIRMAN, U.S. SENATOR FROM KANSAS

Chairman MORAN. Good afternoon, everyone. This hearing will come to order. Good afternoon and thank you for your presence here today. We're going to consider the nominees for the VA Inspector General and the Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs. We'll do so respectively, two different panels. These are two really important and I think difficult positions, and I'm pleased to have two candidates that are committed to—for our consideration, to pursue and perform these duties of these positions.

I've spoken many times here in this hearing and elsewhere about the importance of having a Senate-confirmed Inspector General. The IGs work is essential to identifying areas where the VA is falling short, and this Committee's job would be much harder without the help of an Inspector General.

Before us today is a lawyer, a military spouse, a leader who has been appointed to high level positions within the VA by both President Biden and President Trump, and I look forward to hearing this afternoon how Cheryl Mason, the nominee for VA Inspector General, would continue the IGs independent oversight, if she's confirmed.

Similarly, I look forward to hearing how Don Bergin, the nominee to be Assistant Secretary of Congressional and Legislative Affairs would improve transparency, timeliness, and substance of the VA's communications with this Committee and Congress as a whole, if he is confirmed.

Regardless of which party is in the White House, or which party has control of Congress, the Department of Veterans Affairs has never been as open and as forthcoming as they should be. I'm hopeful that Don, a veteran lawyer and former congressional liaison for

the Marine Corps, and a former Senate staffer, will be able to detail his plans for helping the VA quickly improve on that front in his testimony today.

I appreciate both nominees and their family members for being here today, and for their interest in taking on these roles. In the absence of Senator Blumenthal, Senator Murray, anything you want to say?

Senator MURRAY. I will just ask to put his statement in the record, and welcome Ms. Mason to the Committee.

Chairman MORAN. Without objection.

[The opening statement of Senator Blumenthal appears on page 35 of the Appendix.]

Senator Tillis and Senator Cornyn had planned on being here today to introduce Ms. Mason and Mr. Bergin, but due to their scheduling circumstances are unable to join us. And I ask unanimous consent that their statements be submitted for the record. Without objection.

[Introduction statements from Senator Tillis and Senator Cornyn appear on pages 41 and 45 of the Appendix.]

Chairman MORAN. Ms. Mason, before being recognized for your opening statement, please stand and raise your right hand. Do you solemnly swear or affirm that the testimony you're about to give before the United States Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Ms. MASON. I do.

Chairman MORAN. Thank you. Thank you very much. And Cheryl Mason, you are now recognized for your statement.

PANEL I

STATEMENT OF HON. CHERYL MASON, NOMINEE TO BE INSPECTOR GENERAL, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. MASON. Thank you, Senator. Chairman Moran, distinguished Members of this Committee, I'm honored to sit before you today as the President's nominee to be Inspector General of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

I'm joined today by my husband of 39 years, Brett Mason, Lieutenant Colonel U.S. Air Force, retired, our youngest son, Trevor, and my brother's widow and his adult children. Our oldest son, Bryan, sends his regrets as he was unable to attend.

Since 1865, when President Lincoln proclaimed our Nation's duty was to care for those who had borne the battle, their widows, and orphans, our country has made care for our veterans a tenet. This is the core mission of VA. If confirmed, I pledge to uphold my life-long commitment to the Constitution and to our veterans, their families, survivors, and caregivers.

My commitment to those who serve this country is deep and personal. As an Air Force veteran's spouse, daughter of a Navy veteran, sister of an Army Guardsman, and proud American, I am one

of those survivors and a dependent such as those VA serves. My father served in the U.S. Navy during World War II, but he lost his battle with mental health and died by suicide when I was 4 years old.

My family lived in Appalachia, and we didn't know about the benefits and care he could have received from VA. And as I sit here today, decades later, there are still veterans in this country who do not know about the veteran services they can receive. While others wait much too long for their benefits and care. This is not acceptable.

I also lost my only brother, that Army National Guardsman, to suicide when he was 34 years old. My brother's widow and children received no benefits following his death, and they had to fight to get him recognized as a veteran. This is not acceptable.

It was my mother, a Rosie the Riveter, during World War II and a public servant, government teacher for more than 30 years, who steered our family through these challenging times. She instilled in me the value of public service, the importance of the Constitution and the U.S. Government, and the impact of making a difference to others and to our Nation.

My experiences as a military spouse amplified my understanding of the tremendous sacrifice made by the men and women who commit themselves to the defense of this Nation. When I became a lawyer, I made it my lifelong commitment to serve veterans and military families.

With more than 30 years as a government employee, to include 28 at Department of Veterans Affairs, I have countless hours of service to veterans and their families as a veterans law judge and as a VA attorney. It was an honor to be nominated by President Trump in 2017 and advanced by this Committee under the leadership of Senators Isakson and Tester, and confirmed by the Senate to serve as the first woman and military spouse, chairman of the Board of Veterans Appeals.

And as chairman, I worked with Members of Congress and Senators and staff of this Committee with its long history of bipartisan accomplishments and commitment on behalf of American veterans, to address mental health and suicide, increase accountability, and improve access to benefits and care and services with the Appeals Modernization Act, the MISSION Act, the Blue Water Navy Act, and the VA Telehealth Modernization Act. I was humbled by Senator Tester's tribute to me in the January 2023rd Congressional Record regarding my advocacy and commitment to veterans through my many years of service in the government.

It's an honor to be nominated by President Trump and considered by this Committee to be the VA Inspector General. I remain dedicated to ensuring veterans receive VA benefits, care, and services they earned. And I strongly believe that the VA has to be held accountable to deliver such. Our veterans and their families are counting on it.

My leadership and lifelong experience demonstrate my impartiality, my expertise, my skills, and judgment to be a highly effective Inspector General. My professional legal career provided me with valuable expertise and experience in investigations, audits,

and inspections, focusing on the facts and the evidence, and applying the law.

The VA Inspector General plays a crucial and independent role in ensuring the VA meets its mission by promoting efficiency and eliminating fraud, waste, and abuse. Recent reports from this body, OIG, GAO, and others, highlight the need for improvements of VA's services to veterans. If confirmed, I will use the authority provided by law to implement strong oversight, and strengthen programs, and policy, and culture at VA.

As chairman and veterans law judge, I acted independently, issuing decisions to be followed by VA, guarding the impartiality and independence of the board, and I will do the same as if confirmed as IG. This is indeed a great responsibility, and I can assure you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Blumenthal, Members of this Committee, that if confirmed, I will uphold that trust on behalf of all men and women who serve, all those who have served, and the American public.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Mason appears on page 49 of the Appendix.]

Chairman MORAN. Ms. Mason, thank you very much. Senator Blumenthal, the Ranking Member, is recognized.

**HON. RICHARD BLUMENTHAL,
RANKING MEMBER, U.S. SENATOR FROM CONNECTICUT**

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you. Thank you to Senator Murray for putting my opening statement in the record.

I will just add two quick points. First of all, the Office of Inspector General is one that has to be completely nonpartisan and independent. We have never, I am told, confirmed someone for that position who was a political appointee already serving in any department. You would be unique in that regard, which gives me tremendous pause. And it has to be seen in the context of the firing of most of our inspectors general by the President of the United States, illegally done in a way that seems really regrettable.

So, what we need now, more than any time in our history, is a person in that position who is nonpolitical, completely nonpartisan, and independent. The alternative is for the credibility of the office to be diminished. And so, I think you have the burden of proof at this point before this Committee to show that you will in fact pursue the kind of waste, fraud, and abuse—to use the classic phraseology that has come to be so commonly used that it has lost a lot of its meaning and in reality has been ignored by this administration.

So, that is as much as I think I need to say right now, my full statement is in the record. And thank you for your willingness to serve, to you, and Mr. Bergin. We look forward to your testimony further.

Chairman MORAN. Senator Blumenthal, thank you. Ms. Mason, along the lines, you indicated during your opening statement about some of the things that Senator Blumenthal is talking about. But I share, my number one question on my list is to ask you how your experience as a senior advisor to Secretary Collins will inform your

work and priorities as the VA Inspector General, and how would you maintain objectivity, and independence, and avoid even the appearance of impropriety given that you have been serving as a senior political leader at the department when you're now undertaking a new task with different responsibilities?

Ms. MASON. Well, thank you, Senator Moran, and I appreciate the question. And, Senator Blumenthal, I acknowledge your remarks.

So, let me start with facts and evidence. As a lawyer, and as a previous investigator, facts are extremely important. So, let's look at the facts of who Cheryl Mason is and my track record. I noted that I had worked at the department for 28 years as part of my 30 years of service. Those 28 years were spent at the Board of Veterans Appeals, an independent, impartial organization that holds the vet, holds the department accountable to follow the law and implement veterans' benefits and services that under the decisions made. I spent 20 years of my time, including my time as chairman, as a judge at the board.

So, when the President asked me to return as senior advisor, the role is not as many assume, the senior advisor role may be—at least not my role as senior advisor—my role was to use that knowledge I had at VA, and that experience I had as an impartial, independent fact-finder and advisor to the Secretary on things I understood and knew about VA as a subject-matter expert in veterans law and in leadership.

So, the senior advisor role was to convey, gather information much like a fact-finder does, and convey that information to the Secretary and to other senior leaders. So, it's very—it correlates well to Inspector General. The difference is Inspector General has teeth, and that is very much what is needed.

In the department, I saw it from my 28 years in the department as an attorney, and judge, and chairman. I had to protect the independence of the board on a number occasions against interference. And, you know, those are things that I would do again, as Inspector General, if confirmed.

Chairman MORAN. Ms. Mason, under the Inspector General Act, the IG serves under the VA Secretary, but has a dual and independent reporting relationship with the United States Congress. Explain how, if confirmed, would you balance those dual responsibilities owed to separate branches of the government whose interests may at times conflict?

Ms. MASON. Well, thank you for that question, Chairman Moran. And, you know, as the daughter of a government teacher, I cut my teeth on the Watergate hearings, I well understand the differences and the responsibilities of all three branches of government; the executive branch, and the judicial branch, and the legislative branch.

And indeed, as you note, an Inspector General is unique as much as I am in serving both reporting to the Secretary and reporting to this Committee. And I acknowledge the oversight of this Committee just as I did as chairman. It's extremely important that you have that relationship with the IG so that you can bring those issues and you can also report those same issues to the Secretary to ensure there's awareness of issues and concerns that—so the

Secretary needs to know what's going on in his world, and you need to know what's going on at VA.

Chairman MORAN. Ms. Mason, why do you think the VA has yet to implement so many recommendations made by the Inspector General? And, if confirmed, how would you anticipate working with the VA to close out as many of those recommendations as possible and make certain that future recommendations by the IG are acted on in a much more timely manner?

Ms. MASON. Thank you for the question, Chairman. If confirmed, that is one of the areas that does concern me. There are over 500 pending open, unimplemented recommendations from the IG. Some going back as long as seven years. I believe there needs to be an inventory and accountability on those follow-ups with all of those recommendations.

Even the ones that the department has taken, it's the responsibility of the IG to follow up and monitor to ensure that those are properly being followed. And that's something that I would be setting up as IG, working with the staff as I assess how they work and how they do their work. Because I think following up with those important recommendations to ensure that we're providing the best services, care, and benefits to veterans is extremely important.

Chairman MORAN. Thank you for your answers to my questions, Senator Blumenthal.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thanks. Let me ask you, if confirmed, will you launch an investigation into Secretary Collins's mass termination of employees, which have been found illegal by the courts?

Ms. MASON. Senator Blumenthal, thank you for that question. If confirmed, the responsibility of the IG is to look at all concerns and issues that it brings up itself, whereas the Committee brings up or others. And so—

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Well, I'm asking you about the terminations in particular—

Ms. MASON. If there are—

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Would you want investigation into those terminations?

Ms. MASON. If there are terminations that impact the benefits, and care, and service to veterans that are improper, IG will look into them. Yes.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. It's been found to be illegal. Won't you investigate?

Ms. MASON. Well, I would investigate if—but some of those issues are currently in litigation with the courts, and so it wouldn't be appropriate for me to comment on them at this time.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Will you investigate the Secretary's proposed reorganization?

Ms. MASON. Thank you for the question, Senator Blumenthal. I can't investigate anything until the action occurs. So, OIG would definitely look at that with the team and assess whether there needs to be an investigation into that.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Well, you can investigate actions that are taken preliminarily to a final plan or action. Let me ask you, have you had any role in either the firings of VA employees to date?

Ms. MASON. No, I have not, Senator.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. And what about the plans to fire as many as 83,000 more?

Ms. MASON. Thank you for the question. I have not had a role in any of those activities. Those activities were handled by the HRA team and general counsel.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Have you participated in the realignment of senior executive service staff across the board, VBA, and Office of General Counsel?

Ms. MASON. Thank you for the question, Senator. The situation there was the acting secretary decided to direct some changes across the administrations and staff offices under the President's Executive order to restore accountability to the career SESs and follow the 1979 SES Act. And he felt that it was important to reassign some of these people to ensure collaboration.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. I don't understand. Have you played a role in that realignment?

Ms. MASON. My role was to convey the reassignments to the staff offices that were in my portfolio.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. So, you have participated in those actions?

Ms. MASON. I did not participate. I conveyed the acting secretary's direction to reassign those people.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Okay. We can argue about words here, but I think you get my point, which is you're unwilling to review mass firings which have been found to be illegal. You are unwilling to be forthright in your responses to these questions. You served the Secretary of the VA, correct?

Ms. MASON. I served as a senior advisor to the Secretary of VA for a period of time, but again, as I explained, my role was—

Senator BLUMENTHAL. And to his team?

Ms. MASON. I'm sorry, to his team?

Senator BLUMENTHAL. You served as an advisor to him, and you've worked with his team, correct?

Ms. MASON. I served as advisor to the Secretary, and I advised those within my portfolio as to the directions the Secretary directed.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. And you've considered yourself to be a loyal aide, correct?

Ms. MASON. I consider myself to be an impartial, independent aide to the department because that's my role.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. You considered yourself to be a loyal aide, correct?

Ms. MASON. I am loyal to the veterans. That's who I serve. That's who I'm loyal to.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. You work for him?

Ms. MASON. I work for the President and the Secretary, but I also, if confirmed as IG, will work for this Committee.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Have you been involved in the request of VA employees to sign non-disclosure agreements?

Ms. MASON. Senator, I have not.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. You have had no involvement?

Ms. MASON. I have had no involvement in that activity.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. What is your involvement in the reorganization and the RIFs that Secretary Collins has planned?

Ms. MASON. Senator Blumenthal, I have had no involvement in that activity.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. What have you done?

Ms. MASON. Well, again, my information—my role as senior advisor is to gather information. When you look at how—

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Seems like you haven't been earning your pay.

Ms. MASON. Well, I have because the department is quite siloed, as you know, and VBA is very siloed and—

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Well, what have you done?

Ms. MASON. So, I've been investigating and looking at VBA, and providing advice to the VBA leadership as well as other careerists at the board and at National Cemetery Administration. So, I've been earning my pay 12-hour days almost every day.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. So, you have been earning your pay as a loyal advisor, a member of the Collins' team, an employee at his behest, a political appointee, not as a career civil servant. You are a political appointee as Inspector General, and that is why I will object to your nomination. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. MASON. Thank you, Senator.

Chairman MORAN. Senator Tuberville.

**HON. TOMMY TUBERVILLE,
U.S. SENATOR FROM ALABAMA**

Senator TUBERVILLE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ms. Mason, thanks for being here. The Office of Inspector General recently put out a report highlighting reports within the fiduciary program such as failures with training protocol. Can you commit to working with me and my staff to developing solutions to make the program work better for our most vulnerable veterans?

Ms. MASON. Thank you, Senator Tuberville, and absolutely I can commit to do that. I think that's extremely important.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Thank you. The Inspector General has put out several reports highlighting failures with the Suicide Crisis Line. How would you work with Secretary Collins to ensure these recommendations are implemented to support veterans and reduce suicide?

Ms. MASON. Thank you for the question, Senator Tuberville. As we discussed in your office, I'm very—suicide is very personal to me. I've had two suicides in my family. Both were veterans. And so, I take that very seriously. And I've looked at the IG reports, and I've looked at the other things the department is doing, and there are several activities going on now.

Currently, as a senior advisor of VEO, I'm looking at some of the suicide actions that are being taken to prevent—to do prevention, and awareness, and our partnerships, and I would continue to advise to do that. If confirmed as IG, I would continue to look at those actions to include the grants on mental health and suicide that the department has, make sure there's appropriate oversight into that, as well as what the crisis line is doing. Ensure that they are properly staffed, and have the right support and resources they need to answer those calls because those calls do save lives.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Thank you. When confirmed, what will be your first thing that you want to do as a new IG?

Ms. MASON. Thank you, Senator, for that question. I think, the first thing I want to do is really get a good assessment of the office. I want to make sure the accountability is extremely important, and the integrity of that office is extremely important.

And I have no reason to think that they don't operate that way now, but IG has to operate that way as independent and impartial. And so, I want to make sure that they, one, are operating that way in everything they do, but they also have the adequate resources. And then find out what their current investigations are, see where they are in those investigations.

But right behind that, is follow-up on those open unimplemented recommendations and figure out how we bring those to close with the department and with this Committee.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Thank you.

Ms. MASON. Thank you.

Senator TUBERVILLE. I yield my time.

Chairman MORAN. Senator Murray.

**HON. PATTY MURRAY,
U.S. SENATOR FROM WASHINGTON**

Senator MURRAY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Ms. Mason, you did say on your questionnaire that you continued to be a senior advisor to Secretary Collins after you were nominated to become the Inspector General, monitoring his agency while you were senior advisor to Secretary Collins. What discussions were you involved in related to abruptly canceling contracts or ending DEI efforts or eliminating outreach to LGBTQ+?

Ms. MASON. Thank you for the question, Senator Murray. And to be clear, yes, at the time I answered the questionnaire, I was senior advisor to the Secretary. That role ended very quickly after I submitted that questionnaire. I'm now senior advisor to the VEO and do not sit in the Secretary's suite.

Senator MURRAY. Well, what—

Ms. MASON. So, as for your question as to those roles, the only roles I had with contracts were ensuring that the organizations that were in my portfolio knew that they needed to justify the contracts and ensure that they responded timely. I did not review contracts. I was not involved in those.

As far as in the DEI situation, that was an Executive order. And shortly after the senior advisors came in, they were followed by more senior advisors, and that was not something that was on my plate. That belonged to general counsel and the senior advisor who was charged with EOs.

Senator MURRAY. What—oh, well, I mean, I'd ask Senator Blumenthal's question again. What substantive work were you doing if you weren't involved in any of that?

Ms. MASON. Well, again, my role as senior advisor was to look into actions that were going on in the administrations—

Senator MURRAY. But a lot of the actions that were going on in the administration that we know about were about ending DEI, about firing employees, about canceling contracts. So, that was most of the activity that was going on there, so.

Ms. MASON. That was not in my portfolio. There were separate senior advisors assigned to that. My portfolio was looking at the

way those organizations operated and how they served veterans, particularly VBA, because it's such a large organization. There were challenges with the Digital GI Bill, challenges with disability compensation backlogs and inventory with both the board and VBA, challenges with loan guaranty. There were a variety of challenges within VBA that I was looking at.

Senator MURRAY. Well, let me ask you differently. What was your engagement with DOGE and the White House outside of the Presidential Personnel Office?

Ms. MASON. I have no engagement with DOGE and the White House.

Senator MURRAY. None. Zero?

Ms. MASON. None. No contact. The only contact I had was a swearing in I attended. A swearing in for a person who has since, I guess, left the department in DOGE. That person I attended the VA swearing in. That was it.

Senator MURRAY. Well, as you know, Congress has a responsibility to conduct oversight over the Office of Inspector General to make sure that they are properly conducting their role. So, it's really crucial, as you well know, that the OIG is transparent. If you are confirmed, will you provide us with a list of every ongoing OIG investigation within 30 days?

Ms. MASON. Yes, Senator. I will do so.

Senator MURRAY. Okay. The budget for VA proposed the elimination of "unnecessary outreach activities". From a congressional perspective, it is really critical to make sure that any canceled outreach doesn't impact veterans' ability to receive care that's necessary to provide.

If confirmed, will you hold the department responsible for conducting all outreach that is in statute or policy, even if the political leadership, meaning your former boss, Secretary Collins, doesn't want to reach out to those groups.

Ms. MASON. So, Senator Murray, I will look into all those situations, and I will see where there are statutorily required, and they will be held accountable under my watch as OIG, if confirmed.

Senator MURRAY. Okay. Well, let me just ask this. Congress was very clear in 1978 when it passed the law governing inspectors general. The law states, and I want to quote it, "Each Inspector General shall be appointed without regard to political affiliation and solely on the basis of integrity."

Do you believe that an inspector general should be entirely independent from the administration in which they serve?

Ms. MASON. Thank you for that question, Senator Murray. I do.

Senator MURRAY. Well, you were a political appointee for President Trump in his first term. And as we said on your questionnaire, you said you continued to be an advisor to Secretary Collins after you were nominated for this. Do you believe that this demonstrates the kind of non-partisanship it takes to successfully execute this job?

Ms. MASON. Well, Senator, I would refer to my years of experience in the department. I served 12 secretaries, 6 now, 7 administrations. I am unique in that I was a careerist who became a political appointee during the Trump administration, but I served into the Biden administration, and President Biden appointed me to a

position to ensure that the department was implementing the Executive orders from President Obama, President Trump, and President Biden on hiring veterans and military spouses.

So, yes, I do believe I have that as a lawyer, and as a judge, and as chairman, which was an independent, impartial position.

Senator MURRAY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MORAN. Senator Hassan.

**HON. MARGARET WOOD HASSAN,
U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW HAMPSHIRE**

Senator HASSAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And good afternoon. Congratulations to you and your family on your nomination. And just on a personal note, I'm really sorry for the toll that suicide has taken on your family.

Ms. MASON. Thank you.

Senator HASSAN. And I'm grateful that you have been open about that. I think that openness helps a lot of people. I want to start by asking you a straightforward question that I ask all nominees. If directed by the President to take action that would break the law, would you follow the law or follow the President's directive?

Ms. MASON. Senator Hassan, I appreciate that question, and I will follow the law as a lawyer.

Senator HASSAN. Thank you. Earlier this year, President Trump illegally fired the VA's Inspector General, along with several other inspectors general. Do you support the firing of inspectors general without the President first providing the required statutory notice to Congress?

Ms. MASON. Well, thank you for that question. It would really be inappropriate for me to comment on that as that issue is currently being litigated in the courts.

Senator HASSAN. I will just comment that as a lawyer, as somebody who has prided herself in this testimony to us as on understanding, and investigating facts, and applying the law, I think you could venture to say that the President's firing of the Inspector General at the VA and across government violated the clear language of the statute. And I'm disappointed that you're unwilling to say that.

Let me move on to another question, which really follows up on issues that both Senator Moran and Blumenthal have raised. You've served as a senior advisor to Secretary Collins since January, and you've worked at the VA for decades. The Inspector General is required to be, as you pointed out, nonpartisan and independent from agency leadership.

However, your prior work advising Secretary Collins calls into question your ability to be nonpartisan and independent. If you become the IG, you would need to recuse yourself from many investigations in order to preserve the independence of the office. Will you recuse yourself from any investigations relating to matters you worked on while previously employed by the VA?

Ms. MASON. Thank you, Senator Hassan. And yes, as an attorney, I would, as my duty and as a member of the bar, in certain situations, I would absolutely have to recuse myself. I did so as chairman, I did so as a veterans law judge in that world, and I would do so, as appropriate, as IG.

Senator HASSAN. Thank you. Will you commit to continuing any open investigations that were initiated by the last Inspector General?

Ms. MASON. Yes, Senator, I will.

Senator HASSAN. Thank you. The VA is reportedly planning to fire roughly 80,000 employees. And recent reporting suggests that the VA is requiring all employees who are working on these staffing cuts to sign non-disclosure agreements. However, one key role of the Office of the Inspector General is to independently receive reports of wrongdoing within the VA from employees, and the Inspector General has this obligation, regardless of whether the employee has signed an NDA.

Will you commit that your office will independently and thoroughly investigate any reports of wrongdoing at the VA regardless of any NDAs that employees have been forced to sign?

Ms. MASON. Thank you, Senator Hassan. And absolutely, yes, I will.

Senator HASSAN. Well, thank you. I'm glad to hear you're committed to conducting thorough independent reviews of any allegations of wrongdoing. And I yield the rest of my time.

Chairman MORAN. Thank you, Senator Hassan. Senator King.

**HON. ANGUS S. KING, JR.,
U.S. SENATOR FROM MAINE**

Senator KING. I want to thank you for the time you took for us to discuss your history. You were imminently qualified for this position up to about January 2020. And I don't want to just keep going over and over, but, well, I guess one thing we learned yesterday that the Office of the Inspector General in the VA is being cut by 100 people. Were you aware of that?

Ms. MASON. No, Senator, I was not.

Senator KING. Well, check the budget. You're going to lose 100 people before you even walk through the door.

Ms. MASON. I will definitely look into that sir.

Senator KING. To me, that doesn't indicate a great deal of respect and confidence in the job of the Inspector General. And the challenge that you have is having been a close advisor to the Secretary and then turning around and being Inspector General. That's what we've all been concerned about.

And I think that's—Senator Blumenthal at the beginning said, basically, you have the burden of proof given this close relationship to the Secretary as an advisor for the past four months, through a pretty tumultuous time to convince us that you can turn around and have an objective, independent view of actions taken by the Secretary or by senior advisors.

Give me a reason to vote for you here. I like you. I think you were very well qualified, but it's very unusual. The research I've done, it's very unusual for IGs to be appointed from within the agency that they're going to be an IG. The conflict of interest just sort of jumps out at you. And given your longtime association with the VA, you know the people, and your close association with the Secretary, convince me that you can be objective, and forthright, and tough, which is the job of the Inspector General.

Ms. MASON. Well, Senator, I appreciate the opportunity and thank you for the question. Again, as we spoke yesterday, and as you know, I think it's very important to look at my background and my history. Yes, I came in the department as a senior advisor in January 2025. We are not disputing that. But again, my role as senior advisor, I think there's been some assumptions made. I was brought back at the request of the President. He asked me to return because of my 28 years in the department as an impartial, independent—

Senator KING. And if you were before this Committee as a deputy secretary or another role, I don't think we'd be asking these questions. You're coming into a very unusual job in our government and a very important job, and that's the difference. Do you see that?

Ms. MASON. I understand—

Senator KING. You're not coming in as a policymaker.

Ms. MASON. I understand that. And Senator, very little about my background and my experience is typical. I'm known for my unusualness. So, let me talk about that. I was brought back because of that independence and that background. And when I was asked to advise the Secretary on various things from that independent, impartial review, the Secretary was not looking for yes-people. The Secretary is looking for impartiality, independence of someone that can challenge conventional wisdom, do things differently. That's what I bring to it.

So, from my time as chairman of the board, previously as a judge, I look at things independently and impartially, even stepping out of the role as a careerist into a political role during the Trump administration the first time, and walking into the role as chairman. That provided—that also met with—was fraught with concern, because again, I had to act independently. And I held people in the department at bay when they tried to infringe on actions of the board, and I will do the same as Inspector General.

I'm known as a tough, honest broker. I put veterans first. I am about the veterans and the families of this country. That's who I serve, and that's who I've served for since I was 20-some-years old.

Senator KING. Thank you. I appreciate that, and I appreciate your forthrightness. I'd like to suggest, if you're confirmed, the first investigation should be in these non-disclosure agreements. Number one, they lack the legally required language that's supposed to be in all government non-disclosure agreements that it does not apply to whistleblowers to the Inspector General. The one that has been circulated that we've seen in the department does not have that language. It requires that they report to Congress, but that's about it. In other words, it's an illegal non-disclosure agreement.

The second question I hope you'll examine is why do you need a non-disclosure agreement for talking about a restructuring exercise? Non-disclosure agreements, in my experience, usually involve sensitive procurement information and national security. That's neither the case for how to reorganize the Veterans Administration. I hope that that's something that you might look at.

I think the non-disclosure agreement that's been signed is illegal and unnecessary. And it certainly doesn't fill us with confidence that this is going to be carried out in an open, transparent, and thoughtful way with the engagement of this Committee and inter-

ested parties across the country. So, that is something I hope you'll take under advisement, as we say in the legal field.

But I'm seriously concerned about it. There shouldn't be a non-disclosure agreement on something like how we're going to reorganize the department. And by the way, the department has not been forthcoming at all to this Committee about their plans and how this process of firing 80,000 people is going to be carried out.

Ms. MASON. Thank you. I will take that under advisement. And I do believe that the Whistleblower Act and Accountability Act that was sponsored by Senator Blumenthal should be followed under the law.

Senator KING. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MORAN. Mrs. Mason, Senator King used the phrase or the two words, "close relationship with the Secretary." What is the relationship with the Secretary?

Ms. MASON. I see the Secretary periodically. I would not call our relationship a close relationship. In fact, since the beginning of May I think the day or so after my nomination, I moved out of the Secretary's suite. I rarely see the Secretary. I wouldn't call any relationship I have with him or any other members of the political team a close relationship or a friendly relationship.

Chairman MORAN. And what does your word "periodic" mean?

Ms. MASON. It means I might run into him if we happen to be in the building at the same time at breakfast, and he says hi, and I say hi.

Senator KING. Mr. Chairman, I wasn't going to bring this up, but since you did, yesterday when you left my office and you were walking with my staff member, you noted a Pepsi machine and a Coke machine. You said, "I like Pepsi, but the Secretary's a Coke guy."

Ms. MASON. He is.

Senator KING. That sounds like a relationship to me.

Ms. MASON. No. It was a conversation that was very early. I went into a meeting with diet Pepsi, and he had Coke, and he said, "You know Ms. Mason, I prefer Coke." And I said, "I prefer Pepsi. [Inaudible.] We're going to disagree to disagree."

Senator KING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MORAN. Senator Hirono.

**HON. MAZIE K. HIRONO,
U.S. SENATOR FROM HAWAII**

Senator HIRONO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome, Ms. Mason. I start with two basic questions that I ask of all nominees before any of the committees on which I sit that goes to the fitness to serve. So, I will ask you the following two questions. Since you became a legal adult, have you ever made unwanted requests for sexual favors, or committed any verbal or physical harassment, or assault of a sexual nature?

Ms. MASON. Senator Hirono, it's nice to see you again. I appreciate the question. And no, I have not, but I have certainly been the subject of them.

[Inaudible.]

Senator HIRONO. Have you ever faced discipline or entered into a settlement related to this kind of conduct?

Ms. MASON. No, I have not, Senator. Thank you.

Senator HIRONO. It's very clear that our IGs have to be very independent, and you noted that it is important that IGs be impartial and independent. You said that in the beginning part of your testimony. And there are serious concerns, and I would say, legitimate concerns, about whether you will be able to be independent and impartial because you are—after that you were a senior advisor to Secretary Collins.

Now, you testified today that you had nothing to do with the very controversial firings and the potential firing of another 80,000-plus employees at the VA. But here you are, you sit as a senior advisor and as an attorney, did you ever raise the concern with the Secretary that maybe what he was doing was illegal?

Ms. MASON. Well, Senator, I appreciate that question, and as a senior advisor, what I can tell you about my client is there's privilege. And so, anything I advise the Secretary—

Senator HIRONO. Well, excuse me—

Ms. MASON [continuing]. Stays between me and the Secretary.

Senator HIRONO [continuing]. You testified—you know, you opened the door. You testified that you had nothing to do with the firings and the potential firing of 83,000 more people. And I'm just asking that as senior advisor, did you consider it your responsibility to raise the potential that what he was doing was illegal?

Ms. MASON. Senator—

Senator HIRONO [continuing]. Just answer yes or no. I'm not asking for any other kind of content.

Ms. MASON. Senator, I didn't—

Senator HIRONO [continuing]. In your discussions.

Ms. MASON [continuing]. Know about them until after the fact. So, no, I did not.

Senator HIRONO. See, that is why you're being asked all these questions because as senior advisor, one would think that maybe something as big as the kind of controversial firings that Secretary Collins engaged in would come to your attention and you would say something about it. And so, I think that is one of the reasons that *The Washington Post*, Wednesday, May 28th, they included you in an article, in a list of Trump administration nominees who have, to quote *The Washington Post*, "clearly partisan backgrounds." That is not what we need or want in an IG.

It's bad enough that President Trump fired a whole group of IGs illegally, but his modus operandi says why did he do that? Because he doesn't want IGs that are independent. And so, you step into a role where these kinds of questions are going to come up. It is very clear that this President likes people that he can count on, that he thinks will be loyal to him, that he thinks will do his bidding. That is his modus operandi.

And here you come telling us that you're going to be impartial and independent, and were it not for the fact that you serve as senior advisor. And even when you are nominated to this position, you did not see fit to resign give a little space between your role as senior advisor to an to an agency that you're going to—you're supposed to be investigating independently. That would help, but you didn't do that. And that is why, you know, I think that these questions that we have about your independence in view of why President

Trump fires everybody and gets rid of everybody who can even stand up to him, we have these concerns. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MORAN. Senator, thank you. Senator Duckworth.

**HON. TAMMY DUCKWORTH,
U.S. SENATOR FROM ILLINOIS**

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome, Ms. Mason. I think we served in the building at the same time, at one point.

Ms. MASON. Yes, we did, ma'am.

Senator DUCKWORTH. So, I know exactly what the inner sanctum of the Secretary's office looks like. And if you're behind those doors, you're in the inner sanctum. You're not just floating out there. So, you probably saw him a lot more than you are trying to lead us to believe.

I just want to follow up on your answer to Senator Hirono. Are you invoking attorney-client privilege and not responding to her question?

Ms. MASON. No, I simply—thank you for the question, Senator Duckworth, and it is a pleasure to see you again. No, I'm not. I'm simply saying that there are situations that I may have advised the Secretary and that wouldn't be appropriate for me to talk about. This question she asked me was a question that I could answer, that I was not engaged and involved with and it was not my place to offer my opinion in that situation.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Did you advise the Secretary on setting the 80,000 goal for firing VA employees?

Ms. MASON. No, Senator Duckworth. Thank you. I was not involved in that decision.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Congress established offices of Inspector General in 1978 to, "create independent objective units within agencies." So, I'm going to follow continuing on the questioning line that my colleagues have already started. But critics have questioned whether a Federal agency IG can truly be "independent" if these officials can be fired by a President who leads the administration and IG is tasked to oversee.

Now, to be fair, Congress has recognized the weakness of allowing a President to silence an IG who might uncover problems that an administration would prefer to sweep under the rug. In fact, 30 years after the passage of the original IG Act, Congress amended the law to enhance transparency and oversight over potential IG firings.

Ms. Mason, can you please remind our Committee of what Congress did in passing Section 3 of the IG Reform Act of 2008?

Ms. MASON. Let me see if I remember that one.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Would you like a copy of it? I can give you a copy.

Ms. MASON. That would be wonderful, ma'am.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent to provide the witness with a copy of the Act.

Chairman MORAN. Without objection.

[The information referred to appears on page 147 of the Appendix.]

Ms. MASON. Thank you, Senator Duckworth. And I do remember reading this now. Yes, I think it's really important to note that 2008 was where the Congress put in some protections about the 30-day notice and some other areas that asked the President to do so before removing an IG.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Ms. Mason. So, I raised the question issue of IG independence because the unfortunate reality is this; your nomination is only possible because President Trump fired without a cause or explanation, let alone the 30-day advance notice as required by law, the Honorable Michael Missal who had effectively served as VA IG since 2016.

Ms. Mason, did President Trump violate Federal law when he indiscriminately fired IG Missal and failed to provide Congress with a written notice at least 30 days in advance of the removal of his and intent to fire the independent and nonpartisan VA Inspector General?

Ms. MASON. Well, Senator Duckworth, I appreciate that question. And again, that issue is currently before the courts, and I would have to defer to the courts and the judge to make that decision. And after they make that decision, I will be happy to answer the question.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Then I will come back to you.

Ms. MORAN. Okay.

Senator DUCKWORTH. It's a simple question. As we discussed, the law is clear. It requires written notification to Congress, and it mandates that such notice be delivered at least 30 days in advance. Look, a key reason that Congress established the IG Law was to help ensure any given Presidential administration complies with the law, and I am deeply troubled that you are unwilling to simply identify President Trump's textbook violation of the law. And your nomination was literally made possible because President Trump committed that textbook violation of the law when he fired IG Missal so that he could appoint his own hand-picked appointee, you.

IGs must be willing to speak truth to power. So, let's try a far simpler yes or no question. Ms. Mason, did President Joe Biden win the 2020 Presidential election?

Ms. MASON. The 2020 Presidential election? I believe he did, yes.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Okay. Thank you. And if given an illegal and unconstitutional order by either the Secretary of Veterans Affairs or President Trump what would your actions be?

Ms. MASON. I will always follow the law, Senator Duckworth, just as I did as chairman with the same President in office, as well as with President Biden in office.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MORAN. Senator Duckworth, thank you. I don't anticipate—I don't intend to have a second round of questioning, but I want to give the leeway to the Ranking Member who has a question to follow-up, and then I'll ask you, Ms. Mason, if you have anything you want to conclude your—anything you would like to try to correct, or I'm not suggesting you need to correct anything, anything you'd wish to have said before we ask Mr. Bergin to the table.

Ms. MASON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MORAN. Senator Blumenthal.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to put into the record two articles; one from *Government Executive* entitled, "VA forces staff and work workforce reduction discussions to sign non-disclosure agreements." Another from *The New York Times*, "Fired Inspectors General Raise Alarms as Trump Administration Moves to Finalize Purge," and then a letter that I did to the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency. Chairman MORAN. Without objection.

[The information referred to begins on page 148 of the Appendix.]

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you. Let me ask you. Have you been involved in the termination or firing of any employee of the Veterans Administration?

Ms. MASON. Since taking office in 2025, I have not. Prior to that as Chairman, yes.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. In other words, since taking your present position, you have not been involved in any termination or firing of any single or any employee whatsoever?

Ms. MASON. No, Senator Blumenthal, I have not.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. How about in the cancellation of any contract?

Ms. MASON. I have not been involved in any cancellations of any contract, Senator Blumenthal.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Prior to this role, you served on the President's transition team?

Ms. MASON. I did, yes.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. And what was the subject matter?

Ms. MASON. The subject matter was the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Department of Veterans Affairs?

Ms. MASON. Yes.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. So, your involvement in the Department of Veterans Affairs predated your present position?

Ms. MASON. My involvement with the Department of Veterans Affairs goes all the way back to 1990, Senator Blumenthal.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Well, I mean as part of the Trump administration.

Ms. MASON. Well, as part of—

Senator BLUMENTHAL. When did you begin your service on the transition team?

Ms. MASON. I believe it was the end of November 2024. I would have to check that.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. November 2024. So, for whatever number of months it is, you've been involved in reviewing, and advising, and proposing policies. You've been involved in the workings of the Veterans Affairs Administration.

Ms. MASON. Senator Blumenthal, thank you for the question. Let me clarify. As a member of the transition team, my role was to speak with the careerists, who were currently in office, including Secretary McDonough who were leaving office and find out what they were doing. So, I was part of what they would call the landing team. So, my role was simply to look at that—and ask questions about how they were operating at the time, to get that information so we would be ready to start out Day 1.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Could you give me three decisions or actions by the Department of Veterans Affairs since the inaugural that you've been involved in doing?

Ms. MASON. Well, Senator Blumenthal, as a senior advisor, I'm not involved in any decisions. That's not my role.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. No. I'm asking you whether you've been involved in them as an advisor. Three decisions or actions where you've served as an advisor?

Ms. MASON. I cannot. My role was to gather information and convey that information back and forth.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. I can't believe that you are telling us that you haven't been involved in a single action or decision as an advisor.

Ms. MASON. I don't have the authority to, sir. My only role is to recommend, gather information, convey information, and recommend to different parties.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. I consider your answers just—well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. MASON. Thank you, Senator Blumenthal.

Chairman MORAN. Ms. Mason, anything you'd like to add to the record before we call up Mr. Bergin?

Ms. MASON. Yes, Chairman Moran, a couple of things. So, Senator Hirono brought up the concern about me not stepping out of my role. I did step out of my role as senior advisor to the Secretary shortly after it was announced, and I also moved out of the suite, the Secretary's suite as Senator Duckworth noted. And I thought it was very important that I do so.

Again, you can't just look at me as my role since January 2025. And yes, again, I understand Senator Blumenthal's concern about the perception and assumption of senior advisor. But my role as senior advisor, my role, just me, Cheryl Mason, was to come in and bring the knowledge that I have, my many years of service as an independent, impartial player at the Board of Veterans Appeals, 28 years in that role, and making decisions for veterans, serving veterans, and to look at what the department was doing, particularly within VBA, the Board of Veterans Appeals, primarily, and to ensure that we were doing our best to serve veterans on education, all lines of business in BVA.

I understand that it might be incredulous that I wasn't involved in decisions, but that wasn't my role. My role was to advise and to recommend. Whether the Secretary or other leaders followed my advice is up to them, much like as I did as a consultant, sometimes they do and sometimes they don't.

So, I appreciate it. Thank you, and I am happy to meet with anybody after the hearing, and I look forward to your post-hearing questions. Thank you.

Chairman MORAN. Ms. Mason, thank you very much. And thanks, we welcome your family here with you today as well.

Ms. MASON. Thank you.

Chairman MORAN. Mr. Bergin, would you please join us at the table? Maybe before you sit down, Mr. Bergin, I'll have you stand up.

Mr. Bergin, before being recognized for your opening statement, please stand and raise your right hand and repeat after me, if you

will. Do you solemnly swear or affirm that the testimony you're about to give before the United States Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Mr. BERGIN. I do.

Chairman MORAN. Thank you. Mr. Bergin, you are now recognized for your statement. Welcome to the Committee, and if you have family and others you want to introduce, please do so.

Mr. BERGIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

PANEL II

STATEMENT OF DON BERGIN, NOMINEE TO BE ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR CONGRESSIONAL AND LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. BERGIN. Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Blumenthal, distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I'm deeply honored by the confidence President Trump and Secretary Collins have placed in me to be considered for the position of Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs at the Department of Veteran Affairs.

Although he had to step away to meet with the President, I would like to thank Senator Cornyn for his kind introduction for inclusion in the record. It was an honor to serve alongside a living model of leadership and public service. Senator Cornyn and Sandy are truly the best of Texas.

Finally, I want to express my deepest gratitude to my wife, Grace, whose unwavering support has made it possible for me to serve in this role. I also want to thank my mother, Nancy, who served a quarter century as a military spouse, raising three children with strength and resilience, instilling in me the values that guide my public service today.

The veteran community is my community. I view veterans the same way many of you view constituents in your respective states. I was born into the Army, just up the street from here at Walter Reed Hospital, the son of a West Point graduate. I was raised among veterans from the Vietnam War. From an early age, I witnessed firsthand the stigmas and challenges faced in the community and in seeking care from the VA, struggling with limited access to mental health support, archaic prosthetic services, and a system that often failed to meet their needs. Their resilience shaped my understanding of duty, sacrifice, and the lasting impacts of war.

My family legacy of service runs deep. Both of my grandfathers served in World War II, one in the Army, and the other is a B-17 navigator, flying the infamous bombing mission, missions over Germany. My father spent nearly 25 years in the Army retiring as a colonel. He's buried at West Point. My sister is a VA physician. My wife, Grace, is a Federal employee.

As a military brat, I experienced the sacrifices service members and their families make moving every few years, making and losing friends, and constantly adapting. Profoundly impacted by the Sep-

tember 11th attacks, I immediately walked into the Marine Corps recruiting office. I was honored to join the first class following 9/11 a diverse group of Americans from Wall Street to Main Street, united by shared commitment to our country.

As an infantry commander, I deployed with the 1st Marine Division during the invasion of Iraq, where my unit helped tear down the statue of Saddam Hussein. I later served two consecutive combat deployments in Fallujah, and I was privileged to stand with my fellow Marines whose courage and sacrifice will always stay with me.

Again, the veteran community is my community. I began my service in Congress nearly 20 years ago in the Marine Corps Office of Legislative Affairs, gaining firsthand experience in how critical congressional engagement is to advance the interest of our service members and veterans. I went on to serve in personal offices, on congressional committees, and ultimately in Senate leadership as a National Security Council to the Senate Majority Whip, Senator Cornyn.

Throughout these roles, I witnessed the undeniable truth that when Congress and VA work together under a common purpose, we can deliver real lasting results for the veteran community and their families. Just reference the Post-9/11 GI Bill, the MISSION Act, the PACT Act, and Elizabeth Dole Act to name a few. That collaboration must be honest, bipartisan, and always focused on the needs of those who have served.

This experience has prepared me to immediately strengthen that partnership and ensure the voices of veterans remain at the center of every policy and legislative decision. That perspective is deeply personal for me. As a patient of the VA, I've witnessed the agency's transformation firsthand from the struggles of the Vietnam era to the advancements made for the OIF and OEF generations. That progress in mental health care and prosthetic technology has been remarkable, but there's still more work to do.

In recognition of veterans' extraordinary service, Congress has committed vast resources to honor the Nation's promise to them. We have a shared duty to ensure those resources are used efficiently, effectively, and directly to improve veterans care and benefits. When the Secretary asked me to take on this role, I did not hesitate. It offers a rare opportunity to unite my experiences from the kitchen table to the battlefield, and to Congress, to strengthen this critical partnership and ensure the voices of veterans are at the heart of every legislative conversation.

If confirmed, I'll be a tireless advocate for veterans committed to working hand in hand with Congress in a spirit of cooperation and shared purpose. Together, we can fulfill President Lincoln's promise to care for those who have borne the battle. I'll measure every action by a simple standard; am I delivering meaningful results and real accountability for members of my community who sacrifice so much for this country?

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Bergin appears on page 115 of the Appendix.]

Chairman MORAN. Mr. Bergin, thank you for your statement. Thank you for your service to our Nation, and we welcome your family members who have joined you here today. I thank them for their support of your service to the country.

Mr. Bergin, for nearly 30 years, I've been a member of either the House or the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs. I cannot recall a time in which I thought that the legislative affairs of the Department of Veterans Affairs was as helpful to me as a House member or as a Senator, but more importantly to my constituents. I can't recall the time in which I thought, "Wow, this is really a good job being done."

We had a bit of this conversation in my office, and every—as I became a leader of the Veterans' committees, I had more opportunity to have conversations and hearings with those who were assigned the task of improving service to Members of Congress, service to the committees, but most importantly, our efforts to make sure that veterans who are need our help are getting our help.

So, if confirmed, what actions would you take early on? What's the first steps you would take in your tenure to improve the quality and timeliness of VA's communication with Congress, instill greater accountability within the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs, and set the stage for better working relationship between the VA and this Committee? How would you measure that success?

Mr. BERGIN. Thank you for that question, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I'd like to start with one of the central tenets I learned in the Marine Corps was the qualities of leadership aren't taking on roles and missions because they're easy, you take them on because they're worthwhile. That's why I'm here.

As was pointed out, and I'm sure will not come up in future questions, I have been working as a senior advisor to the Secretary since April. And in that role, and the reason why the Secretary brought me on is because he realized a lot of the issues that had been raised here, a lot of the challenges, a lot of the feedback, and he even experienced that as a Congressman over in the House.

And I will say to that end as well, as a staffer who's worked—I'm looking at the back row of there, but I've spent some time over there, and Senator Blumenthal, I'd like to compliment you for hiring a fellow Tar Heel. I've spent time back there, and I know the frustrations of the challenges of actually getting responses back from nearly every agency in government.

I can't commit to you that it will be perfect, but I can sincerely commit to you that I'll use the experience that I have both in leadership and in working in Congress to get that done. And to that effect, in my current role, I've spent time making recommendations on the way the office should be organized as far as actual personnel, personnel roles, and then, also on processes.

I had the good fortune of working in the Marine Corps Office of Legislative Affairs, and I sincerely appreciate the leadership of the Marines that I served with over there. I think they built a good model, and I'm trying to take away from that model the experiences that I have that I thought were valuable. And then add on top of that, the other experiences that I've had while working in Congress.

So, to that end, first of all, what was most striking to me when I started was the dearth of what we call Congressional Relations Officers here, both in the Senate and in the House. We're pretty short-staffed on that end, and I find it very challenging to be able to accomplish this role without having those assets out there; the people that are knowledgeable, both of your offices and your issues, being able to provide that candid feedback to the office of OCLA and to the Secretary.

So, I've made recommendations that we staff up in those positions. And I've also made recommendations, internal, to processes as far as trying to respond to the Committee in a timely and useful manner, like providing you relevant information that's actually substantive to your request. Because my experience has been when you don't answer questions, you tend to get more questions, you also tend to get more hearings. And I don't know that that's what anyone wants here on the Committee, and I certainly respect your time. So, if confirmed, sir, I will continue to work on that and implement some of the recommendations that I've already made.

Chairman MORAN. Mr. Bergin, thank you for your answer. And I appreciate that it's a difficult task getting timely answers from any department or any agency almost without exception. And I don't know what the exception is, but I want to give somebody the benefit of the doubt in case there is one.

But I do want to highlight that this is not an ego kind of thing because when the Department of Veterans Affairs fails to respond to us, this Committee, the Members of this Committee, the Members of the Senate, it further jeopardizes the life and well-being of veterans across the country.

And I've said this so many times, mostly what I know about what is veterans are encountering is because they'll stop me on the street, they'll send me an email, they'll tell me the story, and that begins the process by which we try to solve problems, sometimes individually. And sometimes those individual problems then lend itself to us figuring out how do we solve problems for more than just a veteran, but veterans across the country.

And so, your job, if confirmed, is hugely important. I mean, you indicate, and I believe you, that you're doing this for the—by motivation of wanting to care for your fellow veterans. This is a task that needs the attention, not because you want to make Members of this Committee happy, but because if you provide the information, perhaps we, along with many others, can serve those veterans and make their life longer, healthier, and the benefits they need to care for themselves, their education, their family.

It's different than just the usual complaint that I suppose Members of Congress might have about an agency that doesn't respond and doesn't function well. The functioning of what you do can be a life-or-death circumstance for those we all serve and all care about. Senator Blumenthal.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I will say I agree with everything that you have articulated so well just now, and I think it summarizes a lot of the role of our Committee, and all of us as Members of the United States Senate.

Let me just come right to the point. First of all, thank you for your service. Thank you to your family, for their service, and thank

you for your willingness to serve in this position. You've been senior advisor at the VA since April, correct?

Mr. BERGIN. Correct.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. And during that time, the VA has engaged in systematic denial of facts, stonewalling of this Committee in an unprecedented way. And it's been, frankly, bipartisan, both sides, inquiries in effect, either ignored or blown off. The few answers we get are mostly boilerplate, non-responsive repetitions of talking points that failed to address basic questions.

It's been true of Secretary Collins testimony, but also the responses that we've received, for example, about the VA's DOGE team, what they do, who they are, what they're working on. We've asked by email, and we've asked in hearings, Senator King has sent a letter, and then more than a dozen colleagues join me in sending subsequent letter requesting information briefing.

We've asked about contracts, and the response has been either to give us inaccurate information, which was acknowledged to be inaccurate, or telling us that you, "will not be providing a briefing on this issue." How do you explain this abject failure on the part of the VA?

Mr. BERGIN. Senator, first, I want to make sure I clarify that I personally did not say that I would not provide a briefing and I want to make sure that that's not the case. And I cannot speak to all the decisions that have been made, sir, but what I can tell you is I also recognize the challenges that the Secretary has taken on in his role. And I think as everyone in this room can attest, the Department of Veterans Affairs is not a flawless organization, but it is a very large organization—

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Well, let me just ask the question again, and I apologize if I implied that you told us that you would not be providing the briefing, the department told us you have been an advisor in the office that was supposed to be responding. Have you been involved in any of the answers to any individuals on this Committee or the Committee itself?

Mr. BERGIN. No, sir.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. You've had no involvement?

Mr. BERGIN. I have not.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. What have you been doing?

Mr. BERGIN. I've been working on organizing the Office of Congressional Legislative Affairs in a way that if I'm confirmed, sir, it will be ready to be more responsive. And I would say, I think if you go back and you look at least at the timeliness of responses that we have been working to some degree to be able to provide those, I've not been involved in the substance or—

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Part of the answer that you've just given me, and I apologize for interrupting, because my time is going to expire shortly, you just said you've been working in restructuring the office so it would be "more responsive."

Mr. BERGIN. Correct, sir.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. I'm going to view that in the most positive light and say, my conclusion is that you would join me in feeling that the office has been unresponsive so far. But you don't have to agree with me or not. The record shows it has been abjectly unresponsive. And to the extent you've been involved as an advisor, and

you've known of our dissatisfaction, and you're going to be taking over, I am troubled that you haven't said to the Secretary, "Secretary Collins, we got to do something here because we're not answering these valid requests for information." Did you ever go to him and say that?

Mr. BERGIN. Senator, I'm very sensitive to the concerns that you've expressed and appreciate them very much. I have had conversations with the Secretary about our ability to respond promptly and substantively. That is his intent, is to be able to get there. The challenges are that the size of the organization takes some time to be able to get there.

And I think everyone would agree that the policy positions of the previous administration and the current administration are fairly vast. So, turning around on a dime for those policies is a challenge that we are working on addressing. So, getting the voice and the vernacular correct in the way we respond is something that's a work in progress.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. My time has expired. Thank you, sir.

Chairman MORAN. Senator King.

Senator KING. First, I should say that you're having been an advisor before now I consider a qualification as opposed to the last witness. The fact that you've been involved in the inner workings, you know what the problems are. Your record is really impressive, and I want to acknowledge that, going back to your enlistment, and anyone that was at Fallujah deserves our respect and thanks.

Senator KING. I intend to—

Chairman MORAN. Senator King, would you pull the microphone closer—

Senator KING. I'm sorry—

Chairman MORAN. I can't hear and I want to hear more.

[Laughter.]

Senator KING. That's a first. I hope that gets in the record.

I'm going to support your nomination because you strike me as a straightforward guy who's going to do his best. And I think you have your work cut out for you. The department thus far has not been forthcoming, has not been responsive, and Senator Blumenthal sort of went down the list.

And I hope that the way you're going to approach this is, "Hey, this is our board of directors up there. We better listen to them, and we better give them the facts," and that is that your approach; that you view your job as conveying to us the factual information about the conduct of the department, and the positions of the department, and the intentions of the department. Is that a fair description of your job description?

Mr. BERGIN. It's a fair description, and it's unfortunate that the chairman just stepped out. But to the same point, Senator, I am very conscious of the fact that I will not make everyone in this room happy. But the necessary part of this role in particular is that we have the discussions, we convey the information, and where we disagree, we have that disagreement and it's an open discussion.

Senator KING. Well, I have no problem with being unhappy with the content. What makes me unhappy is when I'm not—my questions aren't answered and I don't get the information. We can differ

over the policies, but the important thing is that we have the information.

A perfect example is this reorganization. I don't understand why this has to be treated as a national security matter with non-disclosure agreements and not informing the Committee—a major reorganization that involves the firing of 80,000 people is of concern to this Committee. And I think we ought to have an open dialogue with the department about how it's being approached. What's the plan? Who's going to be making the decisions, what's the timeline? To me, it undermines our confidence when we don't get the information.

Another example is the contracts. We started looking for those contracts when the Secretary announced 585 contracts canceled, I think it was on March 4th. We've been asking, and asking, and asking, and the fact that we haven't gotten a straight answer to that question means we're suspicious. What are we not being told? What's in those contracts that the Secretary doesn't want us to know about?

And so, you can go a long way, and I hope you'll really be strong and say, "Look, this is in the interest of you, Mr. Secretary, and the department, to rebuild the confidence of the Committee." This is a generally bipartisan Committee, all committed to veterans. And I think you're in an excellent position. You have a great record to be a really valuable interface between us and the department, but you have your work cut out for you.

Mr. BERGIN. Well, Senator, thank you. First of all, thank you for your personal comments. I appreciate those. I can tell you for your questions, in particular on contracts, Senator, that the Secretary did come back to me, and he expressed frustration about the fact that we haven't provided you that information, and he wanted to be able to have that open discussion.

Because at the heart of it, and I do believe this, Senator, and I wouldn't be here if I didn't, the Secretary does want to get resources directly to veterans and the effort that he is leading, which is a humongous challenge, I think everyone here would acknowledge, is a large undertaking with many challenges.

And part of those challenges, particularly when it comes to personnel and when it comes to contracts are there's very extensive deliberations involved in that, that make it very challenging when you're in the middle of those deliberations, to include court involvement as well, sir. So, the challenge has been getting organized in a way where we can provide you that information, it be deliberative, and it actually represent the policies of both the Secretary and the administration.

Senator KING. Well, there's a tension between preliminary, and predecisional, and final, and you don't get any input. And there's some space in between there where we should be engaged. And it doesn't have to be the earliest part of the discussion, but it may be before the final decisions are made and we're presented with a fait accompli.

My problem is that there's a wise old man once said, "What you do speaks so loudly, I can't hear what you say." And the Secretary comes before this Committee and repeats over and over how he's all for veterans. But what's being done, both in terms of the pro-

posed firing of 80,000 people, and the lack of transparency to us about that program, and about the contracts, speaks louder than that language about, "We're all in this for the veterans."

We all are in for the veterans, but I'm interested in what you're going to do, not what you're going to say. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. BERGIN. Thank you, sir.

Chairman MORAN. Senator Hirono.

Senator HIRONO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome, Mr. Bergin. I will start with the fitness to serve initial questions that I asked Ms. Mason. Since you became a legal adult, have you ever made unwanted requests for sexual favors or committed any verbal, or physical harassment, or assault of a sexual nature?

Mr. BERGIN. No.

Senator HIRONO. Have you ever faced discipline or entered into a settlement related to this kind of conduct?

Mr. BERGIN. No.

Senator HIRONO. So, Mr. Bergin, having served in several congressional offices, being a veteran, if your office is anything like mine, a lot of the constituent services requests come from veterans. Did you find that to be the case in your service for the congressional offices?

Mr. BERGIN. Absolutely. I mean, it's my observation that it's actually the primary outlet. And one of the reasons why this relationship is so valuable is that you represent the veterans in your state. So, you're a tremendous resource for us to work together.

Senator HIRONO. So, I would think that you would consider our ability to respond to veterans to call our offices for help, that that would be a priority for you to make sure that the VA responds and provides the kind of information that the veteran is looking for. And a lot of times, it's things like, you know, with the ratings and all of that. And I think you understand the need to get back to them with these kinds of answers.

Mr. BERGIN. Absolutely. And just anecdotally, when I was first nominated for this position, I think I officially became a congressional office because I received at least 20 calls from veterans asking me about things that were going on in their requests as well.

Senator HIRONO. So, I hope that you can make a commitment to us that it will be a high priority for you to respond to congressional offices' inquiries on behalf of veterans.

Mr. BERGIN. Absolutely.

Senator HIRONO. And the reality is, though, that things are pretty chaotic within the VA. You know, that the word chaos comes to mind. You have firings, you have canceling of contracts, et cetera, et cetera. And in order to respond to our inquiries on behalf of veterans, you need people to respond to them. And so, I would hope that you're going to do whatever you're going to do to get the workers back, because when you start talking about another 80,000 or so more people being fired, that is not reassuring regarding a commitment to making sure that constituent services for veterans will be a high priority. It's a problem. Don't you think it's a challenge?

Mr. BERGIN. It's a big challenge. I agree.

Senator HIRONO. And you acknowledge that the VA is a huge agency. And in fact, it is the largest healthcare system in the entire

country. You have to deal with homelessness, suicides, all the things that your—a prior Secretary says, “put at the top of the list.” But from where I sit—and in fact I have been told by my staff as they try to help veterans with their questions, that they don’t even get an acknowledgement that the VA has received their inquiry.

I hope that that is something that you will fix. Because if we don’t even know whether the VA has gotten our inquiry, it’s like we’re just sitting there going, “What the hell?” So, will you at least implement, “Yes, we got your inquiry. We’re working on it.” That would help.

Mr. BERGIN. I think that’s a fair standard operating procedure. And to that point, and just real quickly, we have two to three staff that do constituent services across all of Congress. That’s not enough, and we’re working on filling those positions so that we can be more responsive.

Senator HIRONO. And already we are seeing delays. And not only do we not get an acknowledgement that VA got our inquiry, but there is a delay now in getting answers. You know, and really with the veterans, I don’t need to lecture you on the importance of making sure that the veterans who served our country, that they get responses. It’s very frustrating. We hear from so many of them who’ve said, “I’ve been waiting months,” and you sound like the kind of person who will give a rip about those kinds of instances and you would want to fix it.

Mr. BERGIN. I will.

Senator HIRONO. Okay. Well, a positive kind of an attitude. I like that, and frankly should you get confirmed. I look forward to the kind of changes that will be happening so that we can get responses, we can help our veterans, they can get answers, they can get delayed payments, et cetera, et cetera, because you’ve been there.

Mr. BERGIN. If confirmed.

Senator KING. Maybe he can get some of those 100 people cut from the OIG’s office.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Maybe when you add to your staff, you can hire back some of the veterans who’ve been fired.

Mr. BERGIN. We have several veterans on our staff. And while we’re here, sir, I’d like to recognize, although we’ve been saying that we are understaffed, and there have been challenges in the office, what I have found since I’ve been there since April is, the team that is there is almost entirely veteran, is extremely diverse and highly qualified, and have been working their tails off many over and through the weekend to get this done. And I know that that doesn’t look satisfactory on your end, but I want to make sure that I recognize the hard work that people are doing in this environment.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. And I want to be clear——

Chairman MORAN. Senator Blumenthal.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. I’m sorry, Mr. Chairman. Thank you. I want to be clear that nothing I have said now or at any time in the past is to impugn in any way the work ethic of the VA workforce. And I am pleased to hear that you think that your office

should be more responsive. The responsibility for the evasive and inadequate responses, I put squarely on Secretary Collins.

Mr. BERGIN. Senator, to that point, Secretary Collins is also frustrated, and he's depending on people like myself, if confirmed, and the other leaders in the organization who, rightfully, this Committee is putting pressure on to fill those leadership roles and to get the job done as the Senator from Hawaii pointed out to serve those veterans.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MORAN. Mr. Bergin, and I have just a follow-up and then we'll conclude the hearing. While I've highlighted the importance of communications, and timeliness, and response, I also want to ask for your help, if confirmed, in one other arena, although there'll be dozens more than the two I will mention today.

We also need to make sure that the Department of Veterans Affairs follows the letter of the law, follows congressional intent. And I hope that you and your position, if confirmed, would be the voice for making certain that the intentions of this Committee and the legislation that is passed by Congress is something that the Department of Veterans Affairs implements, interprets, and proceeds in the manner in which the law says. And in the absence of a clear understanding that of what those words mean that you convey to those who are implementing legislation passed the intent of Congress, does your role include that and are you willing to do so?

Mr. BERGIN. Absolutely, Mr. Chairman. And I have to say, I do not think that I will be put in that position, but as we started off this panel, I've raised my right hand for an oath to the Constitution many times in my career, and I intend to die holding true to that commitment. So, I will follow the law.

Chairman MORAN. Thank you. And I guess the additional part of that response is that you will encourage and that the Department of Veterans Affairs also does so.

Mr. BERGIN. Yes, sir.

Chairman MORAN. Anyone? Okay. Mr. Bergin, there appears to be no other questions, and I thank you for your testimony and your time spent with us. Again, I thank you for your service, your family's commitment to your service, your family's service.

If any Member of this Committee would like to send questions for the record to either one of the nominees, they should do so as soon as possible and no later than the close of business tomorrow. And we would appreciate—here's the standard line in my closing of a hearing—and we appreciate the timely response to any such questions the nominee may receive.

With that, the hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 5:36 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

Opening Statement

Senator Richard Blumenthal, Ranking Member
For the Record
Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee
Nomination Hearing of Cheryl Mason for Inspector General and
Don Bergin for Assistant Secretary of Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs
June 4, 2025

****OPENING STATEMENT****

- Ms. Mason and Mr. Bergin, thank you for your willingness to serve. Welcome to you and your families.
- Today, we will discuss your qualifications and the roles for which you have been nominated. But I'd first like to take this opportunity to discuss the context of your nominations.
- Since day one of this Administration, we have seen a very intentional and systematic attempt to disrupt and dismantle independent oversight.
- The end game is no checks, no balances and no guardrails.
- We saw the President fire the non-partisan head of the Office of Special Counsel (or OSC), which protects whistleblowers who uncover fraud, waste and abuse in the federal government, including VA.
- In his place, the President installed Secretary Collins as acting head of OSC - a clear conflict of interest since OSC is tasked with investigating VA.
- Then last week, the President nominated Paul Ingrassia - a right-wing extremist who has no place in public service – for that position.
- It was a move that served two purposes at the same time – it rewarded a political loyalist and effectively sidelined a key government agency tasked with independent oversight.

- And last week, the President's top lawyer at OMB said the Administration would no longer fully cooperate with the Government Accountability Office (GAO) because doing so was a waste of time.
- As many of you know, GAO has testified before this Committee hundreds of times, and written hundreds of reports at our request about VA programs related to suicide prevention, the Veterans Crisis Line and community care.
- Former Administrations have relied heavily on GAO recommendations to better serve veterans. And – in fact - Secretary Collins has repeatedly pointed to GAO's work to justify many of his actions.
- But these efforts all build from one of the most egregious and counter-productive actions from this Administration – the President's illegal firing of 18 Inspectors General in January.
- That included VA Inspector General, Mike Missal, who served honorably under Presidents Obama, Trump and Biden - uncovering delays in care, issues with the electronic health record, and incorrectly processed PACT Act claims.
- Under Missal's leadership, VA OIG saved American taxpayers \$37.6 billion, including \$1.5 billion in 2023 alone.
- Removing him was clearly not about competence. It was about removing an independent check on the Administration so someone loyal to the President could assume the role.
- Ms. Mason, you were confirmed as Chairman of the Board of Veterans Appeals with bipartisan support in 2017. We all appreciate your work on behalf of veterans during that time.

- However, you were also part of President Trump's transition team, and later appointed as Senior Advisor to the Secretary - both highly-political, partisan roles.
- And while you served as a Senior Advisor at VA, the Secretary fired thousands of employees – with plans to fire 83,000 more. And he did so with no transparency. No accountability.
- We also know you played a key role in the effort to muzzle VA employees, including supporting Non-Disclosure Agreements for numerous employees. That is concerning.
- As you know, the VA Inspector General is a role requiring non-partisan, independent oversight. Yet, you maintained a senior leadership, decision-making role at VA - even after you were nominated for this position.
- More than ever, veterans and taxpayers deserve an IG who will conduct investigations free of interference and collusion from the Administration. This Committee needs to know how you plan to do this, given your close connections to the President and the Secretary.
- Mr. Bergin, I appreciate your service and testimony today.
- But I should note you are currently a Senior Advisor in VA's Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs – the very office stonewalling members of this committee, including myself, and refusing to answer basic questions from Congress.
- We've had to rely on front-line VA workers to tell us the truth about conditions at VA. And that's unacceptable. I hope you will tell us how things will operate differently if confirmed.
- In the past, this Committee has worked together to hold VA accountable for its actions. We work to improve care and

services for veterans, and to ensure the Department is working as efficiently and effectively as possible.

- But accountability and transparency have to be bipartisan priorities – as they always have been. If they are not, it will be a setback for veterans and for taxpayers.
- As we consider the nominees before us today, I hope we will keep that in mind.

Introduction Statements

Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Blumenthal, and distinguished members of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, it is an honor today to introduce Cheryl Mason, President Trump's nominee to serve as the Inspector General of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Cheryl has answered the call to serve once again leaving the quiet of Whispering Pines, North Carolina where she continued championing veterans and military families from the private sector, and returns again to Washington with the steady hand of a lifelong public servant, the expertise of a seasoned executive, and an unwavering commitment to principled oversight.

Her 30-plus years in federal service include leading one of VA's most complex organizations, The Board of Veterans' Appeals—where she served as the first woman and first military spouse to be confirmed as Chairman and implemented some of the most sweeping reforms in the history of the VA.

Cheryl brings precisely the qualities we need in an Inspector General—
independence, discipline, deep operational insight, and an unwavering commitment to accountability.

What sets Cheryl apart is her insistence on measurable results. She's a data-driven reformer who will not be satisfied with surface-level fixes or performative audits. She will ask the hard questions,

follow the facts, and hold leaders to account.

She is also unshakably independent. Cheryl has worked across administrations and political lines, always with the same goal: making government work better.

She is a leader who understands how systems work—and how they break down. She's not coming to this role to learn the inner workings of VA. She's coming to fix what's not working and protect what is. She knows where the risks are—whether in procurement, program integrity, EHR, or performance oversight—and she knows how to design investigative and audit strategies that actually lead to improvement.

Some may wonder whether a former VA executive can truly hold the department to account. Some may raise concerns about the recent reduction-in-force at VA— but Cheryl is a leader who owns tough decisions, listens to feedback, and stays focused on mission.

Just as important is her lived experience. Cheryl knows the pain of suicide in a family. She knows the sacrifice of a military spouse. She knows the cost of failed systems and the urgency of reform.

Chairman, Ranking Member, and colleagues, Confirming Cheryl means placing a principled watchdog at the heart of VA oversight—a leader who will answer only to the truth, the law, and the veterans she’s sworn to protect.

Introduction of Don Bergin for Asst. Sec of VA

Senate Veterans Affairs Committee

Wednesday, June 4, 2025

*Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Blumenthal, thank you for holding this hearing today.

*I'm pleased to introduce my good friend and former National Security Counsel Don Bergin, President Trump's nominee to serve as Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

*As a nation, we owe a great debt of gratitude to our Veterans.

*These brave men and women have voluntarily put themselves into harm's way so that we can sleep safe and secure in our beds at night.

*So when it comes to the people who lead our Department of Veterans Affairs, it's important to me that those who fill these roles are committed to ensuring that we treat our veterans like the heroes they are.

*And I can't think of a more qualified person than Don.

*He understands better than most people do the unique challenges that our veterans and their families face.

*As the son of a West Point graduate, Don was raised a military brat and understands the sacrifices our veterans and their families are required to make from a young age.

*A veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps, Don joined the military following the horrific attacks of 9/11, serving with his brothers in arms in multiple combat tours overseas to ensure our safety here at home. His journey ultimately brought him to Capitol Hill, where he served several years in Congressional and Legislative affairs, including, as I mentioned, as my National Security Counsel while I was Majority Whip.

*But while Don has moved on to other things, he remains a bit of a legend within my office, still offering to mentor incoming staffers and serve as a sounding board for difficult issues.

*And he has developed a strong reputation around Washington for his expertise in legislative strategy as well as his knowledge of the budget process.

*Considering Don's background and experiences, I cannot think of anyone better qualified or better suited to serve as a liaison between Capitol Hill and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

*From access to health care, to obtaining mental health treatment, to the frustrating bureaucratic hurdles that veterans often face, there is much more we can do as a country for those who have sacrificed so much to defend us.

*I'm grateful to Don for the myriad of ways that he and his family have served this country, and for his willingness to continue serving in this new capacity.

*I look forward to working with him to help us ensure our nation's veterans receive the care and the resources they deserve.

*Congratulations, Don, on your nomination, and I look forward to supporting your confirmation.

*Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**Nomination Material for
HON. CHERYL MASON**

Statement of the Honorable Cheryl L. Mason
Nominee for Inspector General of U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Before the
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States Senate

Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Blumenthal, distinguished Members of the Committee, I'm honored to sit before you as the President's nominee to be Inspector General at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

I am joined today by my husband of 39 years, Brett S. Mason, Lt. Col, USAF (ret), our youngest son, Trevor, and my brother's adult children. Our oldest son, Bryan, could not attend due to work.

Since 1865, when President Lincoln proclaimed our nation's duty was to care for those who had born the battle, their widows, and orphans, our country has made care for our Veterans a tenent. This is the core mission of VA.

If confirmed, I pledge to uphold my lifelong commitment to the Constitution and to VA's mission to care for our veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors.

My commitment to those who served this country is deep and personal - as an Air Force veteran's spouse, daughter of a Navy veteran, sister of an Army guardsman, and a proud American. I am one of those survivors and a dependent like those VA serves.

My father served in the Navy during World War II, but he lost his battle with mental health and died by suicide, when I was 4 years old. My family lived in Appalachia and did not know about the benefits and care he could have received from VA.

As I sit here today, decades later, some veterans still don't know about VA services while others wait much too long to get VA benefits and care. This is not acceptable.

I also lost my only brother, an Army National Guardsman, to suicide in 1982; he was 34 years old. My brother's children received no benefits following his death and had to fight to get him recognized as a veteran. This is not acceptable.

It was my mother, a "rosie the riveter" during WWII and a public servant government teacher for 30 years, who steered our family through these challenging times. She instilled in me the value of public service, the importance of the Constitution and the US government, and the impact of making a difference to others and to our Nation.

Statement of the Honorable Cheryl L. Mason
Nominee for Inspector General of U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Before the
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States Senate

My experiences as a military spouse amplified my understanding of the tremendous sacrifice made by the men and women who commit themselves to the defense of this nation. When I became a lawyer, I made it my lifelong commitment to serve veterans and military families. With more than 30 years as a government employee to include 28 years at VA, I have countless hours of service to Veterans and their families as a veterans' law judge and VA attorney.

It was an honor to be nominated by President Trump in 2017, advanced by this Committee under the leadership of Senators Isakson and Tester and confirmed by the Senate to serve as first woman and military spouse Chairman of the Board of Veterans' Appeals.

As Chairman, I worked closely with Members of Congress and the Senators and staff of this Committee with its a long history of bipartisan commitment and accomplishments on behalf of America's Veterans to address mental health and suicide, increase accountability, and improve access to benefits, care and services through the Appeals Modernization Act, the Mission Act, the Blue Water Navy Veterans Act, and the VA Telehearing Modernization Act. I was humbled by Senator Tester's tribute in the January 23, 2023, Congressional Record regarding these accomplishments over my many years of government service.

It is an honor to be nominated by President Trump and considered by this Committee to be the VA Inspector General. I remain dedicated to ensuring Veterans know about and receive the VA benefits, care, and services they earned. I strongly believe that VA must be held accountable to deliver such – our Veterans and their families are counting on it.

I believe my leadership and lifelong experience demonstrate my impartiality, expertise, skills, and judgement to be highly effective Inspector General. My professional legal career provided me with valuable experience in investigations, audits, and inspections – focusing on the facts and evidence and ensuring the proper application and implementation of the law.

Statement of the Honorable Cheryl L. Mason
Nominee for Inspector General of U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Before the
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States Senate

The VA Inspector General plays a crucial and independent role in ensuring the VA meet its mission by promoting efficiency and eliminating fraud, waste, and abuse. Recent reports from this body, OIG, GAO, and others highlight the need for improvements in VA's service to Veterans. If confirmed, I will use the authority provided by law to implement strong oversight and to strengthen programs, policies, and culture at VA.

As Chairman and Veterans' Law Judge, I acted independently from the Department, issuing decisions to be followed by VA and guarding the impartiality of the Board. I created a culture of accountability and service, improved technology, and streamlined processes resulting in more decisions for Veterans and their families.

If confirmed, I will work tirelessly and independently to advance the principles of accountability, integrity, and mission accomplishment at VA on behalf of our Veterans. I pledge to work collaboratively with this Committee, Members of Congress, and Secretary Collins to promote a culture of service to Veterans, to whom we as a nation owe a great debt.

This is indeed a great responsibility. I can assure you, Mr. Chairman, that if confirmed, I will uphold this trust on behalf of all men and women in uniform, all who have served, and the American public.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for Cheryl Mason
Nominee for Inspector General at the
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
From Senator Jerry Moran
Chairman, Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
May 13, 2025**

1. Please detail the professional and personal experiences that you believe prepared you to conduct independent oversight of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

With more than 30 years as a government employee, 28 at VA serving 6 Presidential administrations, I understand the strengths and struggles of VA better than most. As a VA judge of nearly 20 years, I exercised independent judgement reviewing facts and evidence and impartially applying the law across the Department at VBA, VHA, NCA, and OGC. As Chairman, I exercised independence in leading and managing the Board and advising 3 Secretaries on areas of the law impacting veterans, families, caregivers, and survivors. As a Chief Judge at the Board, one of my additional duties was to conduct investigations on a wide range of topics and provide reports to the Chairman or Executive in Charge. During my legal career, I served as an attorney at Federal Labor Relations Authority, reviewing investigations and issuing decisions regarding labor issues. I also served as contract attorney investigator at DOJ Civil Rights Division, performing both investigations and inspections. I began my career as an intern at the Air Force JAG office in Nebraska where I assisted with investigations in both criminal and civilian matters. This led to an internship with US Attorney's Office in the bankruptcy division, assisting with audits and investigations. In private practice, I performed banking fraud audits regarding mortgages and bankruptcy and some criminal investigations.

2. What do you think are the most significant challenges facing VA? If confirmed, what would your highest priorities be and what would you intend to accomplish to help address those challenges?

Accountability, transparency, and siloed activities are among the most significant challenges at VA. My priorities include review of improper benefits and health care payments, long wait times for appointments both at VA and in Community Care, the large inventory of claims and appeals on a wide array of issues with a high return rate, and challenges with modernization efforts including EHRM, IFAMs, and multiple benefit systems. If confirmed, I would begin by assessing and reviewing current IG audits and investigations and the large number of outstanding recommendations to the Department with the focus on these areas as they directly impact services, care, and benefits to veterans and families through evidence-driven oversight.

3. What do you think is the appropriate role of VA in an average veteran's life and, if confirmed, how would you work to improve outcomes among the veterans, caregivers, survivors, and others who use VA health care, benefits, and services?

The VA should serve as a trusted resource that provides essential healthcare, benefits, and services to Veterans, families, caregivers, and survivors from transition from military service to support them in living fulfilling and independent lives to honoring and commemorating their lives and service at their passing. VA's role is to ensure our

Veterans receive the care, benefits, and assistance they have earned to enable them to live full and impactful lives. If confirmed, I would work to improve outcomes by ensuring that the VA operates effectively, lawfully, and with accountability to deliver these services.

4. What do you see as the role of this Committee, specifically, and Congressional oversight, in general?

As the former Chairman, political scientist, and lawyer, I understand the critical importance this Committee and our Senators and Members of Congress play in fulfilling the congressional oversight role established by our Constitution. This committee plays a central role for the OIG.

5. If confirmed, will you commit to personally holding regular briefings, no less than quarterly, with Committee staff to provide updates on the Office of Inspector General's efforts and actions?

Yes, just as I did as the Chairman of the Board.

6. Over the past decade, I have been pleased with the timeliness and comprehensive nature of the VA's Office of Inspector General's briefings and responses to the Committee's requests for information. If confirmed, what would you do to make certain there is no degradation to this precedent of achievement so critical to Congressional oversight of the Department?

If confirmed as IG, I commit there will be no degradation in these briefings. As Chairman, I implemented quarterly briefings with this committee and all four or eight corners as appropriate. I also personally responded to all Congressional requests. I understand and respect the importance of maintaining communication and information flow given the oversight of this committee under the law.

7. If the Secretary, the White House, the Office of Management and Budget, the Office of Personnel Management, or other official entities are working on or issue a directive or guidance that you believe violates the law, how would you respond?

I do not believe that any of the above offices would issue an illegal directive or guidance. I will conduct myself and my office with the highest legal and ethical standards.

8. Please describe your understanding of the mission of the Office of Inspector General. Do you anticipate making any changes to such mission? If so, how and why? If not, why?

The mission of the Office of Inspector General of conducting independent and impartial oversight of VA on behalf of veterans and the American public is critically important to ensuring VA meets its mission of providing benefits, care and services to veterans. This mission is vital to ensuring effective and efficient operations, programs, and services that are free of fraud, waste, and abuse. If confirmed as IG, I commit to focusing on improving mission outcomes.

9. Please describe your understanding of the current organizational structure of the Office of Inspector General. Do you anticipate making any changes to such structure? If so, how and why? If not, why?

If confirmed, I plan to comprehensively review OIG's policies and structure to ensure

that it provide the necessary independent and impartial oversight to help the VA implement changes and improvements to programs, operations, and services that put Veterans first.

10. Please outline the role you played as Chairman of the Board of Veterans' Appeals and include a description of how you handled whistleblower complaints and disciplinary actions for senior executives.

I served as Chairman from 2017 to 2022 under both Presidents Trump and Biden and was responsible for the effective and efficient oversight of Board resources and budget to independently hold hearings and issue decisions on veterans' benefits, care, and services. At the time, I became Chairman, there had been no Chairman for 7 years and Board operations and culture were in chaos. By improving communication, increasing visibility, implementing accountability, and investing in the Board staff, the Board became a strong functioning organization focused on results for Veterans. Growing the Board from 800 staff to more than 1200, including 70 new judges and with the help of Congress increasing the budget enabled me to deliver on my promise to this Committee, the President, veterans, and the American public by doubling decisions and hearings for veterans. I increased technology, streamlined processes, and hired the right people for the right jobs. Building a strong team allowed me to lean forward during the pandemic and deliver even more for veterans, launching the Veterans Tele-Hearings which enabled veterans to having Board hearings from their home – on their cellphone or laptop so as not to create further delays in the process. Additionally, I worked with this committee to champion and implement the Appeals Modernization Act and led the VA initiative to reduce legacy claims and appeals in the Department from 472K to 96K in 5 years. As Chairman, I advised 3 Secretaries over 2 Presidential administrations on legal issues pertaining to veterans' care, benefits, and services.

As Chairman, I directed that all employees be advised of the VA Accountability Act and the law relating to whistleblowers and protection from retaliation. There were a couple of occasions where employees raised issues to me, I followed the law and advised them to reach out to both OAWP and OIG on these matters. As Chairman, I set forth expectations of accountability for all staff, specifically Senior Executives and Board Judges. During my tenure as Chairman, I counseled one Judge and two Senior Executives on issues of performance and insubordination. I also recommended the removal of one Judge, following peer review. I also referred one SES to IG Missal for investigation. As Chairman and an SES, I served for 2 years as the higher-level review authority for VA SES during performance reviews.

11. How do you believe your work as the former Chairman of the Board of Veterans' Appeals will correlate to your work, if confirmed, as VA's Inspector General?

As Chairman, I knew my authority and I understood the Board was the Secretary's designee to decide appeals from throughout the VA – Veterans Benefits Administration, Veterans Health Administration, National Cemetery Administration, and some cases from Office of General Counsel and thus, had to operate independently without Department interference. As such, the Judges of the Board have full discretion under

the law to decide veterans' appeals, and these decisions must be followed by the VA. The Chairman role directly correlates to the IG, as both must operate independently and with impartiality without interference of the Secretary or VA leaders, and both are required to file regular reports to Congress. If confirmed as IG, I would know and understand my authority to conduct investigations, audits, and inspections of the VA to provide oversight and recommendations to ensure effective and efficient operations and programs free of fraud, waste, and abuse. I would work closely with this Committee, Congress, and the Secretary as I did as Chairman.

12. VA employees need to feel confident they will not be retaliated against if they come forward with concerns or complaints about VA management. If confirmed, what will you do to build confidence and trust among VA employees about the confidentiality of the whistleblower process and protect against inappropriate disclosure and retaliation?

VA employees must feel safe and protected to come forward with concerns and complaints about VA management, operations, or improper behavior or actions, whether that be as a whistleblower or a concerned employee. Throughout my 28 years and many leadership roles at VA, I built a reputation as a just, strong and principled leader who supports and encourages all employees in the Department. Regardless of whatever role I served, in fact, even during my 2-year retirement, VA employees reached out to ask me for advice and guidance on confidential matters. Often, I referred them to OIG, Special Counsel, or OAWP. During my time as a senior leader and as Chairman, I often reached out and spoke with IG Missal to discuss issues I became aware of, and I referred a couple for investigation.

As an attorney and leader, I believe it is important to ensure employees know and understand their rights and protections and to safeguard these as leaders, and if confirmed as IG, I would speak openly and publicly about such in all relevant forums.

13. If confirmed, what strategies and policies would you put in place to promote proper engagement with the subjects of investigations to ensure the Office of Inspector General has the information needed to provide an informed recommendation to the Secretary and report to Congress?

When engaging subject of investigations, it is important to follow the law. All parties must be informed of their rights and protections. It is also imperative that they understand the importance of stewardship of the VA and their duties to veterans as employees of VA. As an employee of the federal government, everyone took an oath to support and defend the Constitution and as such, owe it to the veterans and the American public to implement the mission of VA. Communication and information are key

14. One of the most important characteristics to the effectiveness of VA's Office of Inspector General is its independence. Under the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, Congress established the office to create an independent and objective unit to conduct and supervise audits and investigations of VA; promote economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in VA's administration of programs and operations; and prevent and detect fraud and abuse in those programs. Under this law, the Inspector General serves under the VA Secretary but has a dual and independent reporting

relationship to Congress. Given your past and present political appointments, why should Congress, and the American people, trust in your ability to maintain the required independence and to objectively carry out the responsibilities of the Inspector General without undue influence from the current presidential administration?

My oath to US Constitution as a lawyer and Judge and my lifelong commitment to veterans, families, caregivers, and survivors are the foundation of who I am. Integrity, respect, and fairness were instilled in me as a child and young adult as a suicide loss survivor and military spouse and further cemented during my 30 years of government service. I have witnessed the impact of lack of accountability and the broken trust that follows. I spent nearly 20 years as a Veterans Law Judge where I impartially researched, reviewed, investigated, and independently decided the appeals of veterans and families under the law. As Chairman, I ensured that the independence and impartiality of the Board was protected and championed, even in the face of challenges from a VA Secretary and VA senior leaders. Through communication and approachability, I built relationships with stakeholders include Congress, Veterans Service organizations, and employees to ensure veterans received the benefits, care, and services they earned. I provided annual independent mandatory reporting to Congress as Chairman.

I was asked to return to the VA as a senior advisor based on my 28 years' experience and perspective as a VA employee and leader having served 6 VA administrations to challenge conventional wisdom. As senior advisor to the Secretary, my role is similar to that of a consultant - collecting and gathering information to promote collaboration and cooperation across the stove-piped VA Administrations and staff offices and to advise, suggest, and make recommendations to the Secretary and other VA senior leaders with the focus of putting veterans first. I maintain my independence and objectivity as a lawyer and government employee by challenging the traditional responses, accepted line of thinking, available facts as presented, intended outcomes, and risk. I will stand on my reputation, my integrity, my oath to the US Constitution, and commitment to veterans and the American public by fiercely maintaining my independence, if confirmed as IG.

15. What specific steps would you take, if confirmed, to maintain the Office of Inspector General's independence throughout its investigative and decision-making processes?

Policies and procedures in the office of Inspector General are well established and well known, as an example – complying with standards established by the Comptroller General at GAO for federal audits. I have no reason to believe that any changes are necessary; however, if confirmed, I will assess and review these. If I discover an area where the office in the OIG is not maintaining impartiality and independence or there are procedural deviations, I will make changes to address it just as I did as Chairman when I established risk for suicide as a basis for advance on the docket under my independent authority as Chairman.

16. Will you ever decline to investigate or report on a matter due to pressure, or anticipated pressure from government officials outside of the Office of Inspector General?

No

17. One of the most critical roles of the Office of Inspector General to help the Department achieve its mission is following up on reports to monitor and track VA's implementation of the Inspector General's recommendations. If confirmed, what steps would you take to prioritize and attain VA's timely and satisfactory closure of critical open recommendations?

Following up and monitoring open recommendations is critical to ensuring effectiveness and efficiency and preventing fraud, waste, and abuse in VA. From my review of outstanding OIG reports, I find it concerning that there more 500 open recommendations, some going back 7 years. If confirmed as IG, I will work with the Secretary and Congress to resolve these like I reduced the backlog in Department. This unresolved backlog merits the Secretary and senior VA leader prioritization, and as IG, I would recommend quarterly meetings to address progress.

18. In the VA Office of Inspector General's last semi-annual report to Congress, highlighted work during the six-month reporting period included the publication of 180 reports, 710 recommendations for corrective action, \$5.1 billion in monetary impact, the receipt and triage of 18,502 contacts, the opening of 215 investigations, contributions made to 137 arrests, and involvement with 502 administrative sanctions and corrective actions. If confirmed, what metrics would you judge the office's performance by under your stewardship and how will you improve on the office's performance from prior years?

If confirmed as IG, I would create the IG Actions inventory with quarterly reporting on closure rate and monitor and tracking open corrective actions and administrative sanctions with accountability and responsibility assignments. I would review current resolution cycle time and recommend appropriate deadlines to the Department.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record
Nomination Hearing of Cheryl Mason to be
Inspector General of the Department of Veterans Affairs
From Ranking Member Richard Blumenthal**

1. Describe the circumstances of how you came to be considered for nomination to this position, including the reasons your nomination for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Assistant Secretary of the Office of Whistleblower Protection was withdrawn in favor of the Inspector General (IG) position.
The President asked me to return to the VA as a senior advisor based on my 28 years' experience and perspective as a VA employee, judge, and leader having served 6 Presidential Administrations and my commitment to serving Veterans and their families. I serve at the pleasure of the President. It is my understanding that the President believes that my experience as impartial attorney and Judge, and Chairman at the Board of Veterans' Appeals (Board) made me well suited for the independent and impartial role of Inspector General. The depth and breadth of my knowledge and experience, including leading a similarly sized independent VA organization, enables me to understand and assess issues and concerns in the VA with unique perspective.
2. Describe any specific roles, responsibilities and goals for the IG position you have discussed with Secretary Collins.
I have not discussed this nomination with Secretary Collins.
3. What do you believe are the most significant challenges currently confronting the Office of Inspector General (OIG) and how do you intend to address them?
After reviewing recent VAOIG reports and information, there appears to be a challenge in following up and closing open recommendations, which is critical to ensuring effectiveness, efficiency, and preventing fraud, waste, and abuse in VA. From my review of open and unimplemented OIG reports, I find it concerning that there are more than 500 unimplemented recommendations, some dating back 7 years. If confirmed as VA IG, I will work with the Secretary and Congress to address this backlog as I did as Chairman of the Board.

Another challenge is highlighted in the last two OIG semi-annual reports, change. Change brings both opportunities and risk. As the VA is undergoing restructuring and streamlining to better serve Veterans, families, caregivers, and survivors, these require increased agility and flexibility in oversight activities to stay on top of priorities, new initiatives, and emerging issues. If confirmed, I will review OIG processes, policies, and procedures to ensure that OIG has all the resources and focus necessary to continue to serve Veterans and the American public.
4. As of May 19, 2025, Congress has not received Fiscal Year 2026 President's Budget Request. For fiscal year 2025, OIG requested resources of \$296 million, together with \$15.4 million in carryover, to support 1,155 employees. If confirmed, how will you evaluate the funding and staffing needs of OIG?

I reviewed the OIG budget for 2025 and noted the staffing was about 1180 with \$311 million to include carryover. This is similar in staffing and budget to the Board; however, the scope and operations are larger. If confirmed, I will review and evaluate the funding and staffing needs to ensure that OIG is properly aligned and can meet its mission assisting VA putting Veterans first.

5. Do you believe the termination of VA Inspector General Mike Missal was carried out in accordance with law, specifically, 5 U.S.C. § 403(b), as amended by the section 5202(a) of the Securing Inspector General Independence Act of 2022, Public Law 17-263?

As this issue is currently the subject of litigation, it would not be appropriate for me to comment.

- a. In your previous roles at VA, did you ever work with IG Missal and what was the nature of that work?

Yes, I had a working relationship with IG Missal. We discussed concerns regarding the Board, and I referred a couple of issues to him for investigation.

- b. Please list any specific OIG reports, audits or other actions you have been involved in as a VA employee.

There are only two OIG actions, to my knowledge, that I was involved in. The first was the investigation into the improper emails of Board judges and attorneys involving the "Forum of Hate." I was advised as a Chief Judge that I was a target of some emails. The second was regarding a new Board senior executive's inappropriate access to emails of another Board senior executive. I became aware of the issue and reported it to IG for investigation.

6. Under the Inspector General Act, the Inspector General is charged with keeping Congress fully informed about problems and deficiencies at VA.

- a. How does your previous experience at VA demonstrate your ability and willingness to report to Congress? Include specific examples.

As Chairman, I established quarterly reporting with all four corners, I regularly responded to Congressional requests to meet. I hosted both SVAC and HVAC members and staff visits to the Board, and I ensured the annual Chairman's report to Congress was timely, accurate, and informational.

- b. If confirmed, how do you intend to share information with this Committee?

Yes

- c. Do you commit to submit regular official reports to Congress, as required by law, and provide briefings to Congress regarding OIG reviews and related matters upon request?

Yes

- d. VA has recently been labeling information given to Congress as "pre-decisional or deliberative." Please define your understanding of what "pre-decisional or

deliberative" means, and how it affects your decisions to give Congress access to information or deny it.

I view "pre-decisional or deliberative" as under formulation, development or discussion with no final decision determined. In such situations, it would be inappropriate and irresponsible to provide information until all the facts, evidence, and information are considered, as the outcome may change. This is the same process used in investigations and judicial decisions.

7. Under the Inspector General Act, agency officials cannot play a role in OIG decisions about investigations and audits.
 - a. If confirmed, what guardrails will you put in place to ensure sufficient independence of your office from VA leadership?
The IG Act of 1978, as amended is very clear. If confirmed, I would ensure the law is followed with respect to the independence and impartiality of the IG just as I did as Veterans Law Judge and Chairman of the Board.
 - b. Will you commit to recusing yourself from any audits or investigations related to any of your previous roles, responsibilities, or professional relationships at VA including your current work under the second Trump Administration, if confirmed?
Yes
 - c. Will you provide Congress with a signed, sworn, conflict of interest and recusal agreement that has been reviewed by VA's senior legal officials?
Yes
8. If confirmed, do you commit to reporting to Congress if you believe your independence is being constrained, or your office is being interfered with, by any entity or individual inside or outside VA?
Yes
9. There have been numerous examples over the years of senior VA officials, both career and political appointees, refusing to fully comply with VA OIG requests to sit for interviews to discuss matters in which they were involved. If such a situation arose while you were IG, how would you respond to refusals by the Secretary or other senior VA officials to cooperate with your requests?
The IG has many tools to encourage communication and responses to requests. If confirmed, I would utilize the tools afforded to the IG as appropriate.
10. Do you agree that VA employees have an absolute right to petition or communicate with members of Congress and congressional staff that may not be interfered with or denied? If not, what authorities do you think the executive branch has to limit VA employees' communications with Congress?
Yes.

11. You have been involved in limiting VA employees' communication with VA attorneys in the VA Office of General Counsel (OGC), requiring VBA employees to seek clearance from VA leadership prior to such communications. Describe your role and reasoning for this policy change. Why did you support and implement this change in procedure?
 As Senior Advisor, my duties included conveying information and policies to organizational leadership, including policies governed by the Office of General Counsel. This OGC policy required approval by VBA leadership of engagement with OGC and my role was to convey VBA leadership approval to OGC. I defer to OGC as to the origin of the policy
12. Since January 20, 2025, VA has increased use of information technology tracking tools to monitor employee communications. Since assuming your current role in this administration, have you been involved in any discussions on these matters or any other strategies to control and monitor VA employee communications?
 No
13. The use of non-disclosure or confidentiality agreements can be problematic in the federal workplace and may infringe on protected whistleblower activity.
- a. Have you required, or been involved in the decision to require, VA employees to sign non-disclosure or confidentiality agreements in the past and why?
 No
 - b. Have employees involved in your nomination process been required to sign non-disclosure or confidentiality agreements?
 Not to my knowledge.
 - c. Did the VA's Office of General Counsel review any of these non-disclosure or confidentiality agreements to ensure they comply with federal law prior to employees being required to sign them?
 I defer to Office of General Counsel.
 - d. Attach a copy of any non-disclosure or confidentiality agreements you have signed since January 1, 2025. I do not have authority to release any non-disclosure or confidentiality documents as these are the property of the VA. I defer to VA.
 - e. Attach a copy of any non-disclosure or confidentiality agreements you have required other VA employees to sign since January 1, 2025. This is not applicable to me.
14. Since joining VA as a Senior Advisor in 2025, you have served as the Secretary's point of contact over different divisions of VA to include the Veterans Benefits Administration, the Board of Veterans' Appeals, the National Cemetery Administration, the Office of Resolution Management, and general legal policy matters.

- a. Please list each office, Administration or policy portfolio where you have served as the designated Senior Advisor and the time periods when you were assigned that portfolio.

As there were only a few Senior Advisors in January 2025, all Senior Advisor portfolios were large. I was initially assigned Veterans Benefit Administration (VBA), the Board, and Office of Resolution Management (ORM). ORM and general legal matters were assigned to another advisor in February. National Cemetery Administration was added to my portfolio in mid-March. VBA, NCA, and the Board were reassigned to another Senior Advisor at the end of April 2025. As of the beginning of May 2025, I serve as Senior Advisor in VEO.

- b. For each office, Administration, or portfolio you were assigned, describe the top three initiatives you worked on during your period as Senior Advisor for that area of responsibility.

The top three initiatives were and are collaboration, improved communication, and coordination across VA to break down silos and put Veterans first.

- c. Describe any involvement you had in reviewing and approving Congressional inquiries, including Requests for Information, requests for briefings, requests for site visits to VA facilities, and VA officials' testimony in Congressional hearings.

As Senior Advisor, my duties included reviewing information to promote collaboration and coordination of responses with appropriate Administrations and Staff Offices to ensure accuracy and clarity in responses and testimony. Congressional inquiries were coordinated between the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs and the appropriate Administration or Staff Office.

- d. Describe any involvement you had in personnel decisions, including the firing of probationary employees, hiring freezes, Deferred Resignation Program offers, Return to Office orders and cancellation of telework and remote work, and Reduction in Force and Reorganization planning.

As Senior Advisor, I gathered and conveyed information, I was not involved in personnel decisions as those are the responsibility of the Human Resources Administration (HRA) and the leadership of the Administrations and Staff Offices.

- e. Describe any involvement you had in contracting decisions, including review of contracts and cancellation of contracts.

As Senior Advisor, my role was limited to conveying and gathering information regarding contract reviews. Per OALC guidance, I advised leadership of VBA, the Board, and NCA provide clear justifications for contracts and ensured that all information was sent to the appropriate office on time.

- f. Describe any access you had to VA data and information systems, including any involvement with DOGE, Elon Musk or other individuals or organizations outside of VA.

None

15. Since joining VA as a Senior Advisor in 2025, were you at any time assigned an area of responsibility that included OIG or involved in any matters dealing with OIG to include coordination with OIG by the Veterans Benefits Administration, the Board of Veterans' Appeals, the National Cemetery Administration, or the Office of Resolution Management? If so, describe those matters and your involvement.
No.

16. Since joining VA as a Senior Advisor in 2025, you have been involved in the reassignment, reallocation, and removal of VA' Senior Executive Service (SES) employees, including potential whistleblowers. Please describe fully your role in these activities, where the SES or other employees were assigned and reassigned to, the number reassigned, and the reasoning for their reassignment.
As HRA implemented the Acting Secretary's reassignments with coordination of several Administrations and Staff Offices, I defer to them as to the specifics of personnel reassignments.

a. What criteria did you institute, recommend, or advise regarding these processes and decisions?

It is my understanding that the Acting Secretary directed SES reassignments among Administrations and Staff Offices to comply with the January 2025 Presidential Executive Order Restoring Accountability for Career Senior Executives and the July 1979 Civil Service Reform Act that established the SES, stating that SES should rotate assignments to broaden the executive's knowledge, skill, and experience to improve talent development, mission delivery, and collaboration, and bring their experiences and backgrounds to strengthen the Department and serve the mission and needs of the nation. I advised the organizations within my portfolio of the reassignments and followed up on status at the request of the Acting Secretary as directed. To my knowledge, I have not been involved in the reassignment, reallocation, or removal of SES employees who were potential whistleblowers since joining the VA as Senior Advisor in January 2025.

b. How have you ensured protections for whistleblowers in those processes?

All VA employees must follow the law to protect any whistleblowers, and as a VA employee and lawyer, I did so.

17. On March 25, 2025, Secretary Collins notified the Committee that several VA employees had been put on extended administrative leave pending an investigation that they "potentially released sensitive information to external entities without proper authorization." Describe any involvement you had with these investigations and actions.
None.

18. How do the actions you have taken as a Senior Advisor for Secretary Collins align with the role of VA Inspector General?

As Senior Advisor, my duties include gathering, reviewing, and conveying information and then providing my independent and impartial assessment and advice based on my 28

years of VA experience to better serve Veterans and their families. I believe that the position of Senior Advisor directly aligns and correlates with the role of VA Inspector General. The Inspector General gathers and reviews information through audits, inspections, and investigations, makes impartial and independent assessments and provides recommendations on VA programs, operations, and initiatives to improve effectiveness and efficiencies and to prevent fraud, waste, and abuse to deliver improved outcomes for Veterans and to be financial stewards to the American taxpayers.

19. In Executive Order 14296, President Trump directed Secretary Collins to "investigate and take steps to rectify the previous administration's decision to rehire and reinstate back pay for employees previously fired for misconduct and direct such savings back toward care, benefits, and services for veterans, in accordance with all applicable laws."
 - a. Do you believe it is lawful to re-investigate current or former employees who have left or returned to employment with VA under a legally binding settlement agreement?
I defer to OGC.
 - b. Do you believe it is lawful to recoup payments made to these employees under a legally binding settlement agreement?
I defer to OGC.
20. The Office of Special Counsel (OSC) is a key stakeholder in VA OIG activities as it relates to coordination of investigations and avoiding duplicative actions.
 - a. If confirmed as VA OIG, how would you work with OSC to ensure both OIG and OSC safeguard confidential case information and remain independent from agency leadership?
If confirmed, I will review all legal requirements for coordination between OSC and OIG. From my career experience working at Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA), I understand the intersections of jurisdiction with OSC as well as other Federal entities. I intend to operate VAOIG as appropriate to promote legal compliance, accountability, and effective oversight ensuring impartiality and independence.
 - b. If Secretary Collins is again placed in the role of Acting Special Counsel at OSC, how would you maintain OIG's independence and ensure VA employees and whistleblowers are treated fairly?
I do not expect that to occur as there is a person currently in that role. If that should occur, I will follow the law.
21. The Office of Inspector General has worked to address the issue of claims sharks. If confirmed, what action would you take to protect veterans from companies who violate VA laws, regarding preparation, presentation, or prosecution of VA benefits claims?

If confirmed as VA IG, I will take appropriate actions to ensure that Veterans are protected from organizations that violate the law or take advantage of Veterans and their families.

- a. Have you ever received income or honorarium from an organization that is not a VA-accredited agent or attorney, but helps or guides veterans applying for VA benefits?

Yes, and I advised that they should follow the law.

Senator Richard Blumenthal, Ranking Member
Questions for the Record
Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee
Nomination Hearing of Cheryl Mason for Inspector General
June 4, 2025

For Cheryl Mason:

1. On what date did you start serving on President Trump's transition team and on what date did that role end?

I began serving as a volunteer with Trump Vance 2025 Transition Inc., a 501(c)(4) organization, on November 25, 2024. My volunteer role ended on January 19, 2025.

2. What was your title while on the transition team, who was your supervisor and who did you supervise?

My title was volunteer. I did not have a supervisor, and I did not supervise anyone.

3. What were your roles and responsibilities as part of President Trump's transition team? Include examples of actions you took, decisions you advised on, reports and memos that you wrote or contributed to, and any personal involvement you had with President Trump and other members of the Administration.

Based on my experience as an independent and impartial adjudicator of VA decisions for 28 years through six Presidential administrations including serving as a political appointee for both Presidents Trump and Biden, my role with Trump Vance 2025 Inc. was to serve as a volunteer on the landing team, once approved by the Biden White House. As covered by the Presidential Transition Act of 1963, as amended, my volunteer role and responsibilities were to interview members of the VA administration to ensure continuity in the faithful execution of the laws and in the conduct of the affairs of the Federal Government, specifically VA's continued benefits, care, and services for Veterans and their families, utilizing my independent perspective as a Board attorney, judge, and Chairman. As I have held leadership roles through prior administrations, and participated in several interviews with VA personnel, including Secretary McDonough and IG Missal and career staff. I have drafted some questions for the agency following these meetings. Please know that responses to agency's questions are the property of the VA and I no longer have access to these responses.

Also, I participated in one briefing of then Secretary nominee Collins, as authorized in Section 8(A)(i) and (ii) of the Presidential Transition Act of 1963, to acquaint him with successes, potential challenges, and problems facing VA. I have had no personal involvement with President Trump since November 2019 or personal involvement with any members of the current Administration, other than what is reported above.

4. At any point in your role as Senior Advisor at VA, did you tell VBA leadership or any other VA employees they could not communicate with VA's Office of General Counsel?
 Pursuant to my duties as Senior Advisor, conveying information and policies to senior leadership of the Administrations and Staff Offices within my portfolio, I advised senior VBA, NCA, and Board leadership of the Office of General Counsel (OGC) policy that all staff engagements at headquarters with OGC must be coordinated and approved by senior leadership at VBA, NCA, or the Board prior to any OGC engagement. It was my responsibility to convey these approvals of OGC requests of the senior leadership of VBA, NCA, or Board to OGC.
5. As Senior Advisor to Secretary Doug Collins, what regular meetings did you attend? Provide the agendas for those meetings.
 During my time as Senior Advisor to Secretary Doug Collins, I attended a recurring morning stand-up meeting with the Secretary, when he was available. There were no agendas.
6. Provide an export of your work-related calendar invites and invite subject matter during the time you served as Senior Advisor.
 Please see attached calendar exports.

Senior Advisor Cheryl Mason Calendar Exports of Invites and Meetings - 2025

Today < > January 20 - 24, 2025 Work Week

Monday 20	Tuesday 21	Wednesday 22	Thursday 23	Friday 24
		OSVA Morning Huddle, VACO - 10th go Team Sync, VACO - 10th Floor - Dmari go	OSVA Morning Huddle, VACO - 10th go	OSVA Morning Huddle, VACO - 10th go
9 AM				
10 AM	Nomination of the Honorable Douglas A. Collins to be Secretary of Veterans Affairs Oscar Bradley Conference Room SECVA Scheduling		SECVA Scheduling - Weekly w/ Unit go	
11 AM				
12 PM				
1 PM				
2 PM	Onboarding Orientation DOLCOADMHRAB10J238 VACO CS&MO Calendar			
3 PM				
4 PM		A/SECVA Meeting - A/SECVA Suite SEC		

Today < > January 27 - 31, 2025 Work Week

Monday 27	Tuesday 28	Wednesday 29	Thursday 30	Friday 31
VA Appointment Swear-In Ceremony; OSVA Morning Huddle, VACO - 10th go	OSVA Morning Huddle, VACO - 10th go	OSVA Morning Huddle, VACO - 10th go	OSVA Morning Huddle, VACO - 10th go	OSVA Morning Huddle, VACO - 10th go
9 AM				
10 AM	Board touch point with Acting Chairman - Ken Arnold	Go to DCVAMC DCVAMC	SECVA Scheduling - Weekly w/ Unit go VBA	
11 AM	1:1 w/ Mike Frueth (VBA); COSVA Suite; VBA			
12 PM	Meeting w/ Sr. Adh Microsoft Teams M. Frueth, Mike J., VBA; Michael Schneider's Zoom Meeting https://www.zoomgov.com/j/16162017027?pwd=5r6RMZQ5ODNjUjRlMjMjM0MjRlPjA9QjRlbnRlc0o0 Schneider, Michael J CN DCSA REGION B	Meet w/ Acting SecVA; SecVA Suite SEC	Automated Benef 520F Small Cont Compensation Se 520F Small Cont Medical Disabl Office of Field Op 520F Small Cont	SECVA First Week Brainstorming COSVA I
1 PM				
2 PM	Mandatory Training and Ethics review	Meeting with Board Department of Veterans Affairs (425 1 St NW, Washington, DC 20001-2526)		Ethics Training with T. Winston ORCR Syme, Christopher D. Syme, Christopher D.
3 PM				
4 PM				

Senior Advisor Cheryl Mason Calendar Exports of Invites and Meetings - 2025

Today < > February 3 - 7, 2025 Work Week

Monday 3	Tuesday 4	Wednesday 5	Thursday 6	Friday 7
8 AM Swearing In OSVA Morning Huddle: VACO - 10th g	OSVA Morning Huddle: VACO - 10th g	VBA Touch point	OSVA Morning Huddle: VACO - 10th g	OSVA Morning Huddle: VACO - 10th g
9 AM VBA touch point	Meet with Jackie H-B		SECVA Scheduling - Weekly w/ Und g	VBA
10 AM Meeting with Cheryl Mason; Room 101	Board	Board touch point		VBA Leadership S
11 AM Lunch		Lunch	VBA	lunch
12 PM		Follow-up with Jackie H-B		
1 PM Board touch point	Document Management: 1015; Slack, A		VA VR&E IPR: C	Meet with Maria/IGA
2 PM Meet with Marie Vujay			SECVA Meeting - VBA Claims Backl g	
3 PM				
4 PM		Meeting on Nehmer w/SecVA; SecVA g		

Today < > February 10 - 14, 2025 Work Week

Monday 10	Tuesday 11	Wednesday 12	Thursday 13	Friday 14
8 AM OSVA Morning Huddle: VACO - 10th g	OSVA Morning Huddle: VACO - 10th g	VBA touch point	OSVA Morning Huddle: VACO - 10th g	OSVA Morning Huddle: VACO - 10th g
9 AM Board	SECVA Meeting - Briefing on PACT Act SECVA Suite: SECVA Scheduling g	Status of VASP program and NADLI g	SECVA Scheduling - Weekly w/ I g	Board touch point
10 AM		Briefing: SSA Data Match Overpay g	Swearing In: SECVA Suite: SECVA Sched g	
11 AM VBA touch point	VBA/VHA Manila 101 Brief Microsoft Teams Meeting Fruth, Mike J, VBAVACO g	VR&E Reapplication Process Chang g	VBA Executive Huddle Room 520 and Microsoft Teams Meeting Tarnell, Brandlys, VBAVACO g	Lunch
12 PM	INTERVIEW: Microsoft Teams Meetin g	Revision of Delegation Authority C g		
1 PM Sr Advisor Bartrum - Concurrence Disc	TMS Training		SA Mason 1:1 w/Dt. Candace Hughey: g	
2 PM VBA discussion re Elizabeth Dole Act		Discussion: Legislative Hearing Noti g	NASDVA Partnership: VACO Rm. 915C g	VBA OFO Discussion with Ms. Mason: h
3 PM	Touch point with Board Acting Chair	meet with Maria/IGA	GSP Overview w/ OSVA Political Appoi g	SECVA Meeting - Board of Veterans App
4 PM			Elizabeth Dole Act Implementation Brl Rm. 238, VACO DEI Schedulers g	Board follow up
5 PM	1:1 w/Cheryl Mason; Microsoft Teams M		Team Sync with COS g	

Senior Advisor Cheryl Mason Calendar Exports of Invites and Meetings - 2025

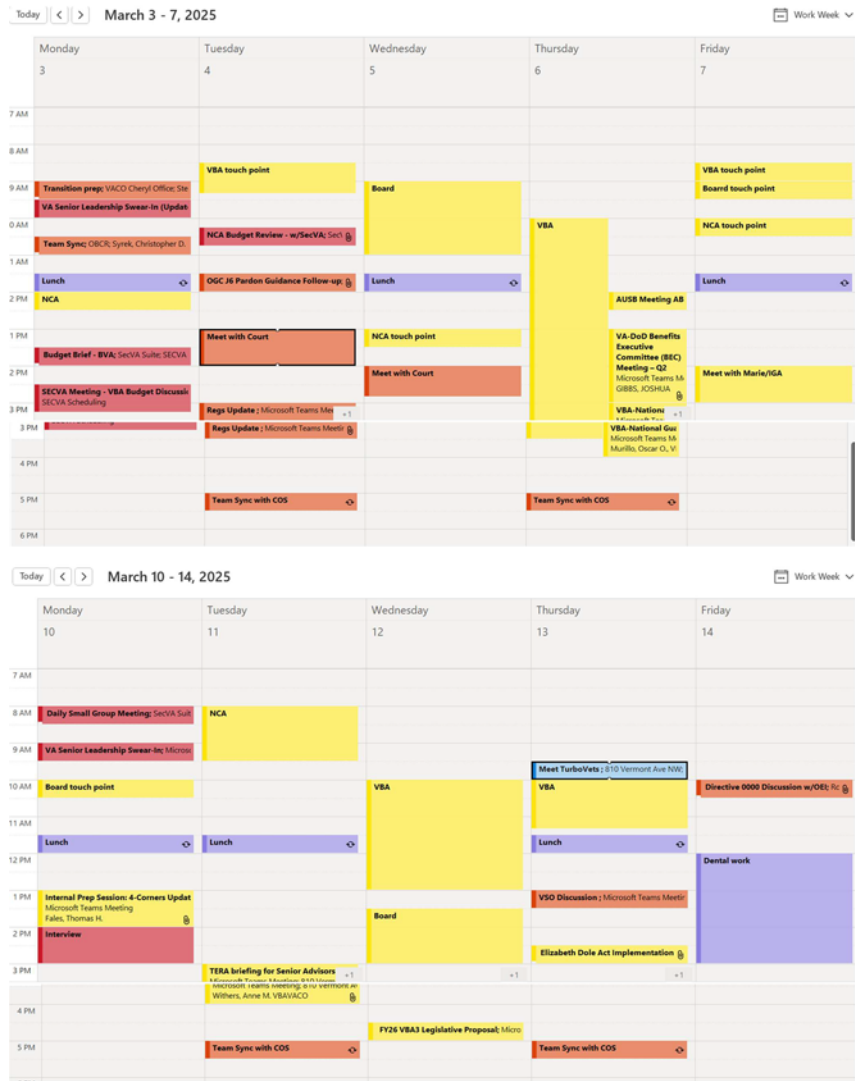
Today < > February 17 - 21, 2025 Work Week

Monday 17	Tuesday 18	Wednesday 19	Thursday 20	Friday 21
President's Day - Observed				
8 AM	VA Senior Leadership Sessar (c; DOB; g)	Board touchpoint	Discussion; Microsoft Teams Meeting; M	Meet with Ken/Board
9 AM	OSVA Morning Huddle; VACO - 10th g		VBA follow up	Meeting with Mike and Beth; Microsoft
10 AM	Discussion on Liberty University Aulati Microsoft Teams Meeting; SZDC; Riddic g	Discussion of duties; Army Senior Fe g VBA		
11 AM		Deep Dive Briefing to Senior Advisor Mason In Person; S2D anal; Odoemenem, Lk g Lunch; Odoemenem	Lunch	Lunch
12 PM	Lunch			
1 PM	Board touch point	Education Briefing In Person Meeting; Odoemenem, Lk g	Delegations / Del; VA VBAE IPR; C g	Meet with Ron/NCA
2 PM				
3 PM				
4 PM	Touch point VBA			RE: Legion mid-winter Questions an g
5 PM	Team Sync with COS		Team Sync with COS	
6 PM				

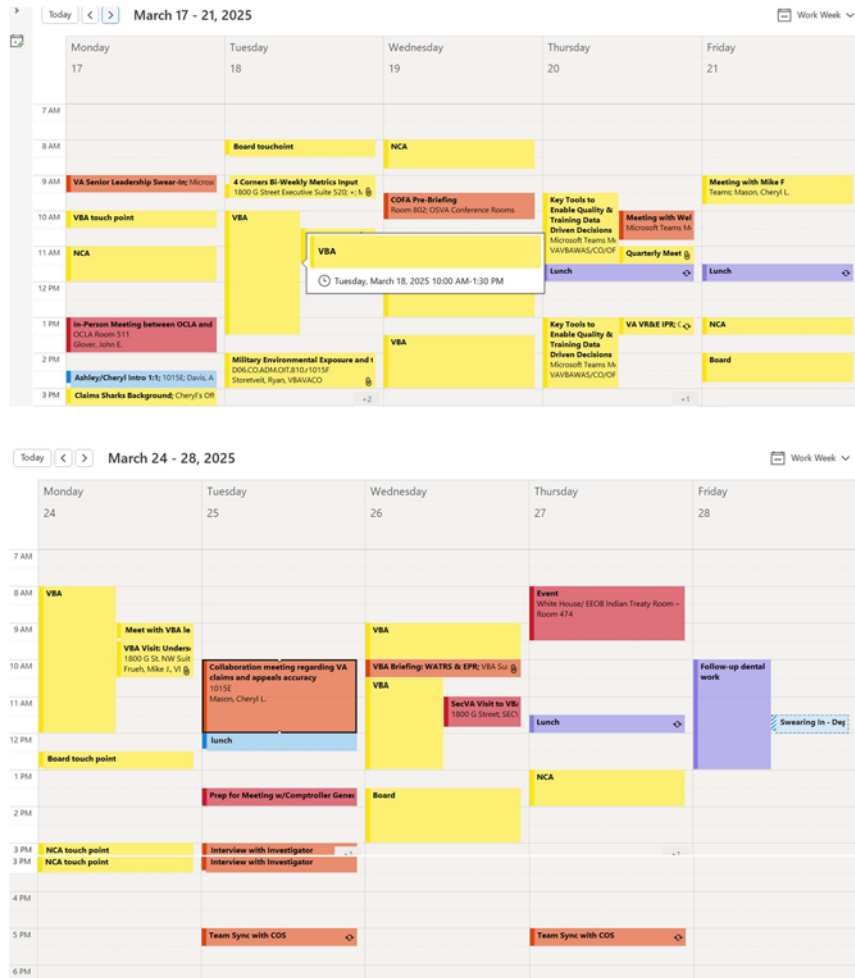
Today < > February 24 - 28, 2025 Work Week

Monday 24	Tuesday 25	Wednesday 26	Thursday 27	Friday 28
			COSVA TDV; Leighton, K; Symk, Christopher D	
8 AM	Touch point with NCA Acting USM	Touch point with VBA AUSB	Touch point with Board Acting Chair	
9 AM	VA Senior Leadership Sessar (c; DOB; g)			
10 AM	Briefing on VA/DoD Collaborations - V OSCA; SECVA; Scheduling g	Prebrief for AUSB and AUSH; TERA g	CMR discussion	
11 AM	meeting; Mason, Cheryl L	VBA (AUSB & APC VBA Suite S2D; Fruit	VEO/Mr. Courtney Stecker Transiti g	Appt
12 PM	Meeting with Todd Hunter; my office; N	Purchase Card Discussion; 1015-F; DOA	Lunch	
1 PM	Meet with Court	Board	NCA	
2 PM	NCA	Case Distribution Microsoft Teams g		
3 PM				
4 PM				
5 PM	Touchpoint; COSVA Suite; Symk, Christo			
6 PM	Team Sync with COS			

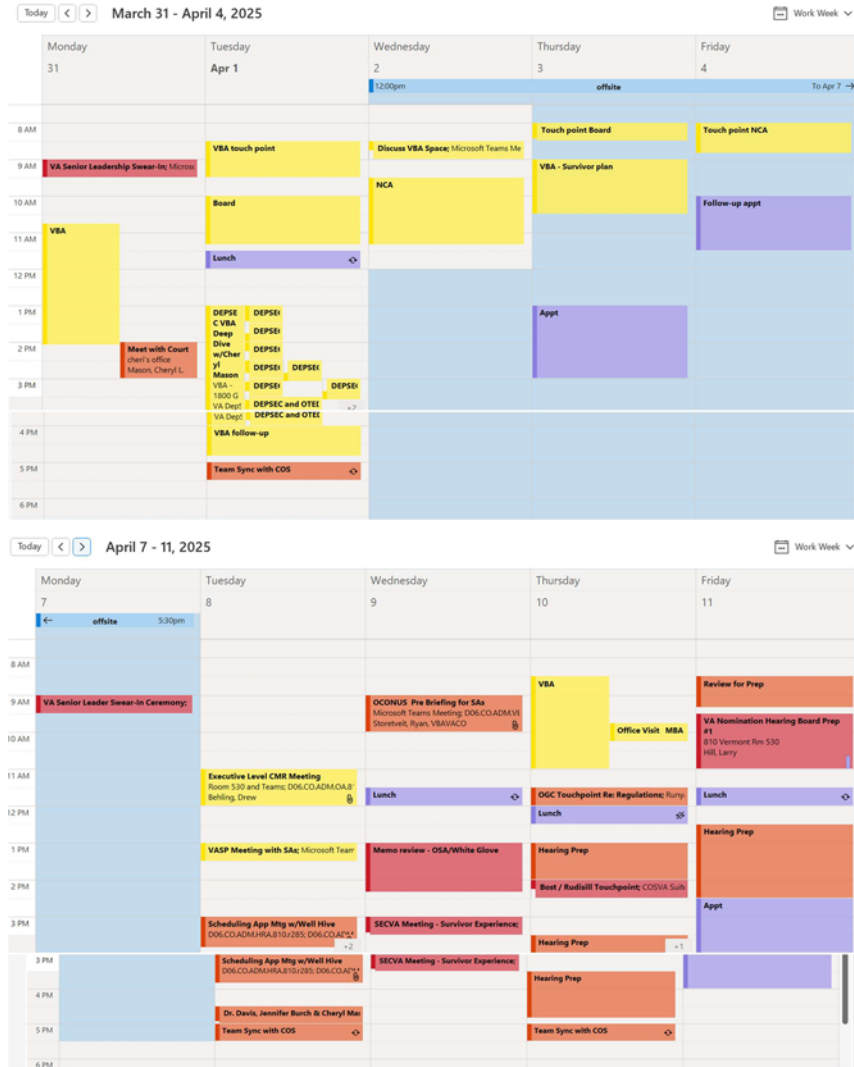
Senior Advisor Cheryl Mason Calendar Exports of Invites and Meetings - 2025



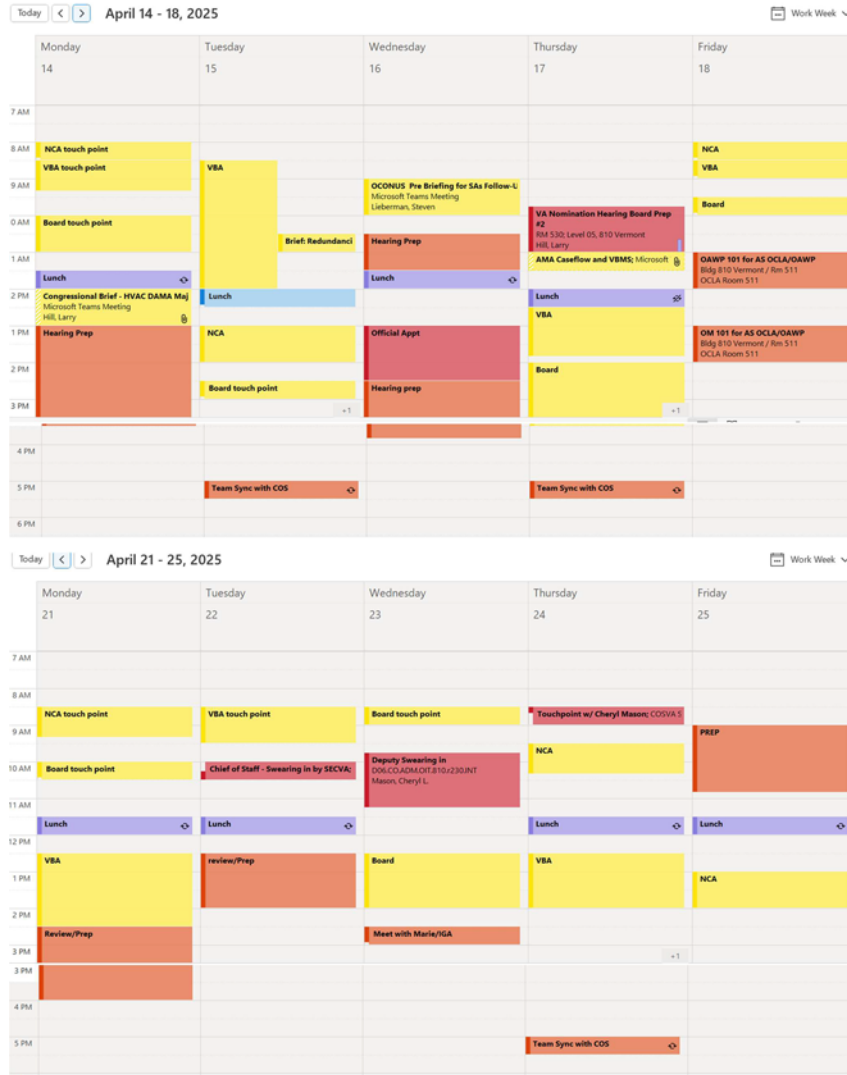
Senior Advisor Cheryl Mason Calendar Exports of Invites and Meetings - 2025



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Senior Advisor Cheryl Mason Calendar Exports of Invites and Meetings - 2025

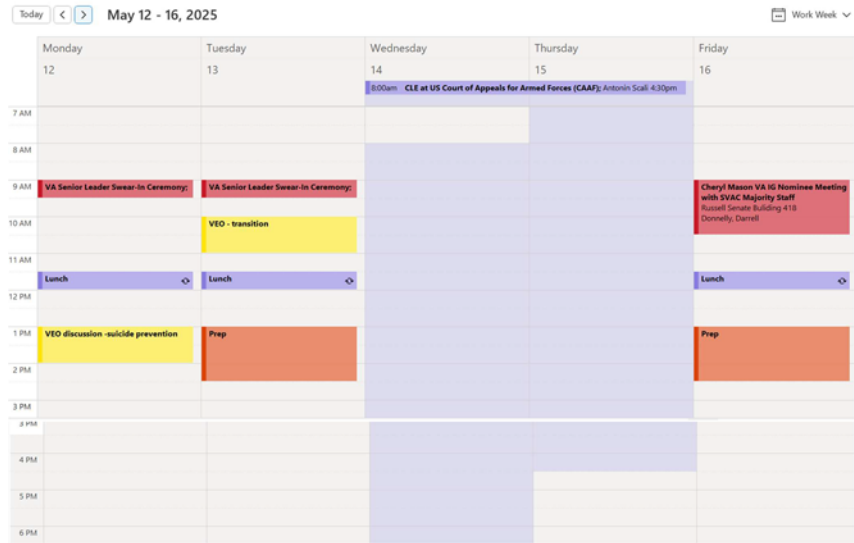
Today < > April 28 - May 2, 2025 Work Week

Monday 28	Tuesday 29	Wednesday 30	Thursday May 1	Friday 2
		11:00am	off site	To May 4 →
8 AM NCA touch point		Board		
9 AM Board touch point		NCA		
10 AM VBA touch point/wrap up	VA Nomination Hearing Board Prep #1 RM 530, Level 05, B10 Vermont Hill, Larry			
11 AM Lunch	Lunch			
12 PM				
1 PM Meeting with Well Hive Hybrid-Room 430/MS Teams Meeting NCA Front Office Calendar	NCA Portrait unveiling			
2 PM				
3 PM	Marie/GA meeting			
4 PM				
5 PM				

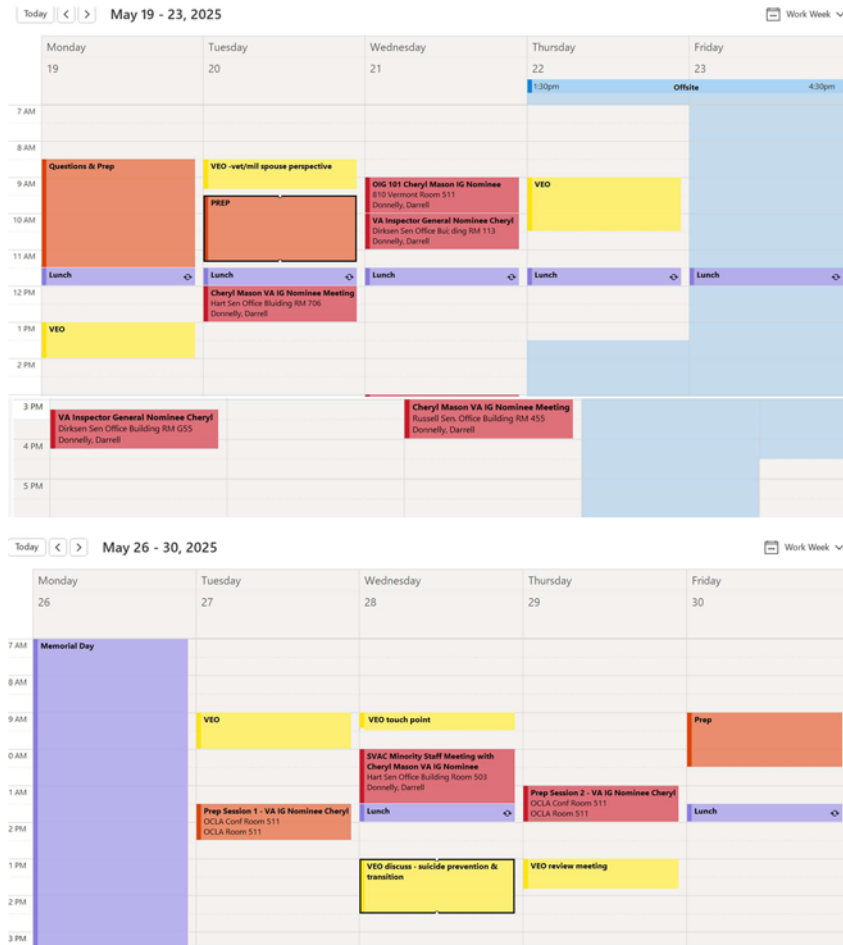
Today < > May 5 - 9, 2025 Work Week

Monday 5	Tuesday 6	Wednesday 7	Thursday 8	Friday 9
				Ad hoc work prep
			Move to VEO office	
9 AM VA Senior Leader Swear-In Ceremony	Board touch point and wrap up	Meeting re duties and location reassig		
10 AM NCA		Meet with Court - transition duties	VEO team meet and greet	
11 AM Lunch	Lunch	Cemetery Establishment Discussion	Lunch	
12 PM				
1 PM Marie/GA meeting - NCA	Meet with Court re Dole Act	NCA touch point and wrap up	Prep meeting for IG nom	
2 PM Fargo National Cemetery Proposal Dis	Elizabeth Dole act - collaboration meeting - VBA/VHA/VEO/OEI	VEO meeting		
3 PM				
4 PM				
5 PM				

Senior Advisor Cheryl Mason Calendar Exports of Invites and Meetings - 2025



Senior Advisor Cheryl Mason Calendar Exports of Invites and Meetings - 2025



**Senator King
Questions for the Record
Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee
Pending Nominations
June 4, 2025**

Questions for Cheryl Mason

1. During your confirmation hearing, you stated repeatedly that, in your role as Senior Advisor, your role was to "gather information and convey that information to the Secretary and other Senior Leaders" and convey the directions or decisions of others within the Department.

- a. Please describe—with specificity—the issues you have worked on as Senior Advisor. Simply describing the individual offices or issue areas (BVA, VEO, etc.) that you worked within is not sufficient. What "information" did you gather and convey?

As Senior Advisor to the Secretary, I conveyed the Secretary's vision for VA including VBA, NCA, and the Board, to deliver timely access to care and benefits for every eligible Veteran, family member, caregiver, and survivor; placing Veterans at the center of everything VA does, focusing relentlessly on customer service and convenience; challenge the status quo to find new and better ways of helping VA beneficiaries; celebrate the vast majority of VA employees who do a great job every day and hold employees accountable when they fall short of the mission; and do a better job reaching Veterans at risk of homelessness or suicide – especially those who have had no contact with VA. To implement this vision, the Administrations and Staff Offices were tasked to assess current processes and operations, to breakdown silos, and to look for opportunities to collaborate within the Administrations and across the VA to put Veterans first. As Senior Advisor, the Secretary tasked me to assist VBA, NCA, and the Board in implementing his vision because of my 28 years' experience as an independent and impartial adjudicator of VA decisions at the Board of Veterans' Appeals..

I gathered information regarding Veterans' or family member communications to the Secretary or Chief of Staff and conveyed these to VBA, the Board, or NCA or other Senior Advisors or VEO, as appropriate and followed up on status of responses. I also conveyed information regarding Congress or Senate requests regarding specific Veteran issues to VBA, NCA, or the Board, followed-up, and conveyed responses to the Secretary or other senior leaders, including the Office of Congressional Affairs.

Pursuant to my duties as Senior Advisor, conveying information and policies to senior leadership of the Administrations and Staff Offices within my portfolio, I advised senior VBA, NCA, and Board leadership of the Office of General Counsel (OGC) policy that all staff engagements at headquarters with OGC must be coordinated and approved by senior leadership at VBA, NCA, or the Board prior to any OGC engagement. It was my responsibility to convey these approvals of OGC requests of the senior leadership of VBA, NCA, or Board to OGC.

As Senior Advisor, I conveyed information regarding timely submission of all taskers issued by the tasking person or office following all guidance from the issuer. Also, I conveyed information regarding the review of the VA Purchase Card program to VBA, NCA, and the Board and ensure responses were timely submitted.

As Senior Advisor to the Secretary, I gathered, and conveyed information pertaining to:

- the long history of the *Nehmer* case, based on my previous perspective as Chairman;
- the relocation of the Office of Survival Assistance from VBA back to the Office of the Secretary;
- VBA's mortgage programs;
- the Second Amendment and National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) policy at VBA;
- VBA's fiduciary governance;
- on the cooperation and communication between VBA, the Board, and OGC on the claims and appeals processing, backlog, and inventory to reduce siloed actions to provide more accurate timely decisions to veterans and their families
- pertaining to the status of any collaborative engagements between VBA, the Board, and OGC to address trends and precedential decisions from the US Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims;
- regarding VBA and Department of Labor -VETS collaboration;
- the status of all VBA's activities regarding outreach and transition of service members
- the status of PACT ACT cases;
- implementation and plans regarding the Dole Act and any collaboration with VHA and VEO;
- the status VBA's implementation of the Vets Safe Travel Act with VHA and TSA; and
- regarding issues around several education programs to include payments at several universities; insurance issues, and survivor claims issues.

I also worked with VBA on the establishment of the White Glove initiative for Veteran's survivors including gathering information, facilitating collaboration on training with Administration and Staff offices, and reviewed VBA's plan for the initiative prior to submission to the Secretary.

I gathered and conveyed information between all VBA staff offices, including Compensation, Pension, Medical Exams, Insurance, Dependency and Indemnity, Field Operations, Policy, Loan Guaranty, Education and Training, Veteran Readiness and Employment, Outreach and Transition, Adjudication Review, and Financial Management with VBA senior leadership and advised on collaboration opportunities between these offices to enhance communication, collaboration, and awareness and to assist VBA senior leadership to prioritize workload across these staff offices to meet the Secretary's vision of putting Veterans first.

I also gathered and conveyed Veterans' and VSOs' information from other staff offices like VEO and Intergovernmental Affairs to ensure collaboration and communication with VBA, NCA and Board leadership.

I gathered and conveyed information regarding pending VBA and NCA regulations, NCA on cemetery activities across the VA cemeteries as well as requests regarding VA cemeteries. I conveyed information between NCA and the VA office of Intergovernmental Affairs and advised on the establishment of routine meetings between these offices.

I gathered information on the operations of the Board and conveyed information on workload, including concerns regarding increasing remands and pending legacy appeals, and pending status of the relocation of the office due to expiration of their lease. Also, I gathered information from the Board regarding VHA appeals incorrectly charged to the Board and conveyed information to VHA and OGC to set up meetings to address this issue.

I also forwarded misdirected information not in my area of responsibility to the Senior Advisor or Political Appointee with that responsibility and notified the sender on whom to send the information to in the future.

This information is to the best of my recollection since January 20, 2025.

*My work as Senior Advisor in VEO is set out in part c below.

- b. What directions or decisions were you responsible for conveying? Who made those decisions or gave those directions? Who did you convey them

to? Again, please be specific in your descriptions.

The Secretary issued directions and decisions directly to the Department. As Senior Advisor to the Secretary, I conveyed information and provided advice on decisions from the Secretary, the Chief of Staff, and Office of General Counsel to senior leaders including the Acting Undersecretary and Acting Principal Deputy in VBA and NCA, and Acting Chairman of the Board.

At the request of the Acting Secretary and as Senior Advisor, I conveyed his decision to reassign SES in VBA and the Board, and where they were to be reassigned. I conveyed the information as directed to the Acting Undersecretary of Benefits in VBA and the Acting Chairman of the Board.

As Senior Advisor, I reconveyed the VA Chief of Staff's directions to the Acting Undersecretary of Benefits in VBA, the Acting Undersecretary of NCA, and the Acting Chairman of the Board to provide justifications in contracts and the timeline for submissions.

On limited occasions, I shared decisions of the Acting Undersecretary and Acting Principal Deputy of VBA, the Acting Undersecretary of NCA, and Acting Board Chairman with other Senior Advisors and senior political appointees to enhance collaboration and cooperation within the Department to breakdown siloes both in the Administrations and across the Department.

- c. Since you are currently still serving as Senior Advisor, what are you currently working on and responsible for within the Department? Again, please be specific in your descriptions.

In my current role as Senior Advisor in Veterans Experience Office (VEO), I am gathering and providing information on Veteran transition and suicide prevention, suicide awareness, and military spouse engagement. I also gather information and provided advice on increasing strategic partnerships across the Veteran and military communities. I review data and information on VEO's collaboration with both internal and external organizations on suicide prevention.

**Senator Marsha Blackburn
Questions for the Record
Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee
"Hearing to Consider Pending Nominations"
Wednesday, June 4, 2025
4:00 PM**

**Questions for Mrs. Cheryl Mason, Nominee to be Inspector General, U.S.
Department of Veterans Affairs.**

1. You stated that accountability and transparency are among the most significant challenges at VA. What new measures will you implement to ensure that findings of misconduct will lead to timely disciplinary action and increased accountability?

If confirmed as IG, I will review the current IG process and determine any existing constraints impacting current procedures. I will implement measures regarding findings of misconduct to include specific recommendations of corrective actions, as appropriate, to VA leadership and will establish timelines within IG to follow up on whether actions were taken. I will also immediately discuss these issues with the Secretary. In cases of fraud or criminal conduct, I will ensure these are quickly reported to DOJ and work with them and any other agencies as appropriate. I also intend to establish a trend analysis dashboard to track repetitive issues from the Department as these may indicate challenges with accountability.

2. What specific safeguards need to be in place to ensure that investigations into misconduct allegations aren't delayed as long as they were in the Mountain Home situation?

I was recently made aware of the Mountain Home situation. If confirmed as IG, I will assess the current processes and available resources regarding investigations, timelines, and prioritizations. Prioritization of investigations into misconduct is extremely important as it can impact service to Veterans and the culture of the office. I anticipate bolstering due dates for findings with the investigation teams in misconduct allegation cases to include set expected timelines for investigation, tracking, preliminary assessments, and recommendations.

3. What oversight role does the VA OIG currently play in monitoring the progress and challenges of the EHRM program, and how do you plan to improve it?

Under the IG Act of 1978, the VA OIG has authority to review all VA programs and the related actions of entities performing under contracts with the department. Moreover, the Veterans Benefits and Services Act of 1988 charged the OIG with overseeing the quality of VA health care. Oversight of the EHRM program comes under both of these provisions. OIG has three offices that can assess EHRM: the Healthcare Inspections

teams ensuring that VA maintain a fully functional healthcare program that promotes timely and high-quality patient care and prevents adverse events; the Office of Audit and Evaluations that audits and evaluates VA programs and operations to enhance integrity and promote efficiency; and the Office of Data and Analytics enables the OIG to conduct proactive oversight of VA programs and operations, including electronic health record modernization implementation efforts.

If confirmed, I plan to evaluate the processes regarding the follow-up and review of the 30 EHRM recommendations, as of last semiannual 2025 report, that have not yet been fully implemented—to include the six open and unimplemented recommendations since 2021. Additionally, I would utilize the tools and information available to ensure that the OIG teams are collaborating on their audits, investigations, and analysis of EHRM.

4. What mechanisms does the OIG have in place to ensure timely investigations if future issues are identified within EHRM?

Pursuant to the law, OIG has the authority to conduct investigations of all VA programs. If confirmed, I will review and assess the OIG mechanisms for implementing new investigations including the timeliness and timeframes in EHRM and other modernization programs that provide services and care to Veterans.

**Senator Bill Cassidy
Questions for the Record
Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee
Hearing to Consider Pending Nominations
June 4, 2025**

**Questions for Cheryl L. Mason, Nominee to be Inspector General of the U.S.
Department of Veterans Affairs**

1. In your testimony, you describe your familial experience with veteran suicide. My sincere condolences for the tragic loss of your brother. Last October, I wrote a letter to former VA Secretary Denis McDonough regarding the failure of the Overton Brooks VA Medical Center to adhere to standard practices on veteran suicide prevention after the VA OIG wrote a report detailing shortcomings at the facility. It is possible that the tragic loss of a veteran in Louisiana could have been prevented if the correct procedures and administrative oversight had been conducted. If confirmed, will you commit to providing strong oversight of VA medical centers with regards to failures of veteran suicide risk screening and assessment, documentation, administrative performance oversight, and accountability practices?

[Yes. If confirmed as IG, I commit to do so.](#)

2. In February, Senator Hirono and I reintroduced the bipartisan VetPAC Act of 2025 that would create a new Veterans Health Administration Policy Advisor Commission (VetPAC) to facilitate an independent commission to improve veteran patient health care delivery and address challenges within the VHA by conducting regular assessments and reports to Congress. This legislation would require the commission to review VA OIG reports on the VHA for recommendations to improve veteran care. Will you commit to working with the independent commission once it has been established to improve healthcare for our veterans at the VHA?

[Yes, if confirmed as IG, I will do so.](#)

UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

ROOM 412 RUSSELL SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510
Telephone: (202) 224-9126

QUESTIONNAIRE
FOR PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEES

The Rules of the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs require that a Presidential nominee whose nomination is referred to the Committee submit, on a form approved by the Committee, a sworn statement concerning his or her background and financial interests, including the financial interests of the nominee's spouse and children living in the nominee's household. The Committee form is in two parts:

- (A) Information concerning the employment, education, and relevant background of the nominee, which is made public; and
- (B) Information concerning the financial and other background of the nominee, which is made public only when the Committee determines that such information bears directly on the nominee's qualifications to hold the position to which the individual is nominated.

Committee action on a nomination, including hearings or a meeting to consider a motion to recommend confirmation, shall not be initiated until at least five days after the nominee submits this form unless the Chairman, with the concurrence of the Ranking Minority Member, waives the waiting period. In order to assist the Committee in its consideration of nominations, the Committee requests that each nominee complete the attached Questionnaire for Presidential Nominees. The notarized original and any supplemental information should be delivered to:

Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States Senate
Room 412, Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Attention: Chief Clerk

PART I: ALL OF THE INFORMATION IN THIS PART WILL BE MADE PUBLIC

1. Basic Biographical Information

Please provide the following information.

<i>Position to Which You Have Been Nominated</i>	
<u>Name of Position</u>	<u>Date of Nomination</u>
Assistant Secretary for Accountability and Whistleblower Protection (ASecVA OAWP)	10 Mar 2025

<i>Current Legal Name</i>			
<u>First Name</u>	<u>Middle Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Suffix</u>
Cheryl	Lee	Mason	

<i>Addresses</i>					
<u>Residential Address</u> (do not include street address)			<u>Office Address</u> (include street address)		
			Street: 810 Vermont Ave NW		
City: Whispering Pine	State: NC	Zip: 28327	City: Washington	State: DC	Zip: 20420

<i>Other Names Used</i>						
<u>First Name</u>	<u>Middle Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Suffix</u>	<u>Check if Maiden Name</u>	<u>Name Used From</u> (Month/Year) (Check box if estimate)	<u>Name Used To</u> (Month/Year) (Check box if estimate)
Cheryl	Lee	McCain		X	Est 11/1964 ☐	Est 6/1986 ☐
Cheri		McCain			Est 01/1970 ☐	Est 6/1986 ☐
Cheri		Mason			Est 06/1986 ☐	

<i>Birth Year and Place</i>	
Year of Birth (Do not include month and day)	Place of Birth
1964	Portsmouth, Ohio

<i>Marital Status</i>					
Check All That Describe Your Current Situation:					
Never Married	Married	Separated	Annulled	Divorced	Widowed
☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐

<i>Spouse's Name (current spouse only)</i>			
<u>Spouse's First Name</u>	<u>Spouse's Middle Name</u>	<u>Spouse's Last Name</u>	<u>Spouse's Suffix</u>
Brett	Stuart	Mason	

<i>Spouse's Other Names Used (current spouse only)</i>						
<u>First Name</u>	<u>Middle Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Suffix</u>	<u>Check if Maiden Name</u>	<u>Name Used From</u> (Month/Year) (Check box if estimate)	<u>Name Used To</u> (Month/Year) (Check box if estimate)
Brett	S	Mason			Est ☐ 01/1979	Present ☐
					Est ☐	Est ☐

<i>Children's Names (if over 18)</i>			
First Name	Middle Name	Last Name	Suffix
Bryan	William	Mason	
Trevor	Keegan	Mason	

2. Education

List all post-secondary schools attended.

<u>Name of School</u>	<u>Type of School</u> (vocational/technical/trade school, college/university/military college/correspondence/distance/extension/online school)	<u>Date Began School</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate)	<u>Date Ended School</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate) (check "present" box if still in school)	<u>Degree</u>	<u>Date Awarded</u>
Ohio Northern University	University	Aug/1982 Est ☐	Feb/1986 Est ☐ Present ☐	BA	2/28/1986
University of Dayton Law School	University	Aug/1986 Est ☐	May/1987 Est ☐ Present ☐	NA	
Creighton University School of Law	University	Aug/1987 Est ☐	May/1989 Est ☐ Present ☐	JD	5/13/1989
		Est ☐	Est ☐ Present ☐		

3. Employment

(A) List all of your employment activities, including unemployment and self-employment. If the employment activity was military duty, list separate employment activity periods to show each change of military duty station. Do not list employment before your 18th birthday unless to provide a minimum of two years of employment history.

<u>Type of Employment</u> (Active Military Duty Station, National Guard/Reserve, USPHS Commissioned Corps, Other federal employment, State Government (Non- federal Employment), Self- employment, Unemployment, Federal Contractor, Non- Government Employment (excluding self-employment), Other	<u>Name of Your Employer/ Assigned Duty Station</u>	<u>Most Recent Position Title/Rank</u>	<u>Location</u> (City and State only)	<u>Date Employment Began</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate)	<u>Date Employment Ended</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate) (check "present" box if still employed)
Federal Employment	Department of Veterans Affairs, Board of Veterans' Appeals	Senior Advisor to the Secretary	Washington, DC	1/2025 ☐	Present ☐
Self Employed	Eisbar Resources LLC, d.b.a. Catalyst Leadership Management	President	Whispering Pines, NC	1/2023 ☐	1/2025
Federal Employment	Department of Veterans Affairs, Board of Veterans' Appeals	Executive Director, Veteran & Military Spouse Talent Engagement	Washington, DC	8/2022 ☐	1/2023
Federal Employment	Department of Veterans Affairs, Board of Veterans' Appeals	Chairman (ASecVA)	Washington, DC	11/2017 ☐	8/2022 ☐ ☐
Federal Employment	Department of Veterans Affairs, Board of Veterans' Appeals	Deputy Vice Chairman (DVC)	Washington, DC	9/2016 ☐	11/2017 ☐ ☐
Federal Employment	Department of Veterans Affairs, Board of Veterans' Appeals	Chief Veterans Law Judge (VLJ)	Washington, DC	1/2006 ☐	9/2016 ☐ ☐
Federal Employment	Department of Veterans Affairs, Board of Veterans' Appeals	Veterans Law Judge (VLJ)	Washington, DC	12/2003 ☐	12/2005 ☐ ☐
Federal Employment	Department of Veterans Affairs, Board of Veterans' Appeals	Senior Counsel	Washington, DC	11/1998 ☐	12/2003 ☐ ☐

Federal Employment	Federal Labor Relations Authority	Attorney	Washington, DC	Est 12/1997 ☐	Est 11/1998 ☐
Federal Contractor	CACI/DOJ Civil Rights Division	Attorney Investigator	Washington, DC	Est 9/1997 ☐	Est 11/1997 ☐
Non federal Contractor	Legal Personnel Placement recruiting company/Hogan & Hartson	Attorney / recruiter	Washington, DC	Est 7/1997 ☐	Est 9/1997
Unemployed	Unemployed	Mom & Military spouse	Lakeridge, VA	Est 6/1997 ☐	Est 7/1997 ☐
Federal employment	HQ/USAFE/SCP	Secretary / executive assistant	Ramstein AB, Germany	10/1995	5/1997
Unemployed	Unemployed	Mom & Military spouse	Ramstein AB, Germany	1/1995	9/1995
Federal Contractor	Central Texas College	Paralegal coordinator	Kapaun Air Station, Germany	9/1994	01/1995
Unemployed	unemployed	Military spouse	Ramstein AB, Germany	7/1994	9/1994
Federal employment	Department of Veterans Affairs/ Board of Veterans' Appeals	attorney	Washington, DC	9/1990	7/1994
Unemployed	Unemployed	Military spouse	Washington, DC	8/1990	9/1990
Self-employment	Mitchell & Demerath Law Office	attorney	Omaha, Nebraska	9/1989	8/1990
Unemployed	unemployed	Military spouse	Bellevue, Nebraska	5/1989	9/1989
Other	Offutt Air Force Base JAG Office	intern	Bellevue, Nebraska	8/1988	5/1989
Other	US Attorneys Office	Summer intern	Omaha, Nebraska	6/1988	8/1988
Other	Offutt Air Force Base JAG Office	intern	Bellevue, Nebraska	01/1988	5/1988
Unemployed	unemployed	student	Bellevue, Nebraska	8/1987	12/1987
Non Federal employment	JCPenney	Sales associate	Bellevue, Nebraska	7/1987	9/1987

Unemployed	Unemployed	Military spouse/Law student	Dayton, Ohio	8/1986	6/1987
Non Federal employment	McDonalds'	Food service	Dayton, Ohio	7/1986	8/1986
Non Federal employment	Oasis carry out	Cashier	Portsmouth, Ohio	3/1986	7/1986
Non Federal employment	Ohio Northern University	Work study program	Ada, Ohio	8/1985	2/1986
Non Federal employment	Cedar Point, Inc	Cashier	Sandusky, Ohio	5/1985	8/1985
Non Federal employment	Ohio Northern University	Work study program	Ada, Ohio	8/1984	5/1985
unemployed	Unemployed	Student	Portsmouth, Ohio	7/1984	8/1984
Federal employment	Congressman Bob McEwen	LBJ intern	Washington, DC	6/1984	7/1984
Non Federal employment	Ohio Northern University	Work study program	Ada, Ohio	8/1983	5/1984
State/county government	Scioto County Jobs program	Classroom assistant	Portsmouth, Ohio	6/1983	8/1983
Non Federal employment	Ohio Northern University	Work study program	Ada, Ohio	8/1982	5/1983

(B) List any advisory, consultative, honorary or other part-time service or positions with federal, state, or local governments, not listed elsewhere.

<u>Name of Government Entity</u>	<u>Name of Position</u>	<u>Date Service Began</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate)	<u>Date Service Ended</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate) (check "present" box if still serving)
N/A		Est ☐	Est ☐ Present ☐
		Est ☐	Est ☐ Present ☐
		Est ☐	Est ☐ Present ☐

4. Honors and Awards

List all scholarships, fellowships, honorary degrees, civilian service citations, military medals, academic or professional honors, honorary society memberships and any other special recognition for outstanding service or achievement.

Department of Veterans Affairs Distinguished Career Award 2023
Hiring Our Heroes Bonnie Amos Lifetime Achievement Impact Award 2022
Disabled American Veterans' Outstanding Federal Executive 2021
Department of Veterans Affairs Exceptional Service Award 2020
FedHealthIT Leading for Impact: Women in Leadership Award 2020
Hiring our Heroes Military Spouse Employment and Mentoring Award 2019
Ohio Northern University Distinguished Alumni Award 2010
Department of Veterans Affairs Board of Veterans' Appeals Leadership Initiative, Leader in Excellence Award, 2011

5. Memberships

List all memberships held in professional, social, business, fraternal, scholarly, civic, charitable, or other organizations in the last ten years.

Unless relevant to your nomination, you do NOT need to include memberships in charitable organizations available to the public as a result of a tax-deductible donation of \$1,000 or less, Parent-Teacher Associations, or other organizations connected to schools attended by your children, athletic clubs or teams, automobile support organizations (such as AAA), discounts clubs (such as Groupon or Sam's Club), or affinity memberships/consumer clubs (such as frequent flyer memberships).

<u>Name of Organization</u>	<u>Dates of Your Membership</u> (You may approximate)	<u>Position(s) Held</u>
Nebraska Bar Association	1989 to present	none
American Bar Association	1989 to present	none
National Rifle Association	2006 to present	none
Army Navy Country Club	1998 to present	Spouse member
Military Spouse JD Network	2017 to present	none
Vet Jobs / Military Spouse Jobs	2019 -- 1/2025	Advisory Board Member

The Independence Fund	5/2023 to 12/2024	Board Member
Children of Fallen Heroes	6/2023 to 12/2024	Ambassador
Operation Honor - Rural Salute	9/2024 to 12/2024	Board Member
Shield of Sisters	7/2023 to 4/2024	Board Member
America Corporate Partners	2/2023-12/2024	Advisory Council Member
Military Spouse Chamber of Commerce	9/2023 to 12/2024	Board Member
Warriors Ethos	9/2024 to 12/2024	Board Member
Veteran Career Journey	4/2024 to 12/2024	Board Member
Ohio Northern University, Alumni Advisory Board (College of Arts & Sciences)	Est 2008 to 6/2017	Chair and board member
Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims Bar Association	2002 to 2023	none
Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary	Est 2014 to 2022	none
Ohio Northern University Washington DC Alumni club	2003 to 2022	none
Fellowship of Christian Athletes	2013 to 2018	none
Executive Women in Government	2010 to 2015	none

6. Political Activity

(A) Have you ever been a candidate for or been elected or appointed to a political office?

<u>Name of Office</u>	<u>Elected/Appointed/ Candidate Only</u>	<u>Year(s) Election Held or Appointment Made</u>	<u>Term of Service</u> (if applicable)
N/A			

(B) List any offices held in or services rendered to a political party or election committee during the last ten years that you have not listed elsewhere.

<u>Name of Party/Election Committee</u>	<u>Office/Services Rendered</u>	<u>Responsibilities</u>	<u>Dates of Service</u>
N/A			

(C) Itemize all individual political contributions of \$200 or more that you have made in the past five years to any individual, campaign organization, political party, political action committee, or similar entity. Please list each individual contribution and not the total amount contributed to the person or entity during the year.

<u>Name of Recipient</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Year of Contribution</u>
N/A		

7. Publications

List the titles, publishers and dates of books, articles, reports or other published materials that you have written, including articles or blog posts published on the Internet.

<u>Title</u>	<u>Publisher</u>	<u>Date(s) of Publication</u>
Dare to Relate: Leading with a Fierce Heart (ISBN 979-8-88926-022-6)	Manuscripts	4/2024
www.linkedin.com/company/catalyst-leadership-mgmt/ Posts to promote book sales, leadership development, & other relevant topics	Eisbar Resources LLC d.b.a. Catalyst Leadership Management	4/2024 to Present
www.catalystleadershipmgmt.com Marketing page to promote book sales, leadership development, & other relevant topics	Eisbar Resources LLC d.b.a. Catalyst Leadership Management	4/2024 to Present
LinkedIn www.linkedin.com/in/cheri-cherly-mason-executiveleader Individual Profile	Self	Est 2003 to Present
The Real Story: Debunking Myths About Women in Business https://lionessmagazine.com/myths-about-women-in-business/	Lioness Features -	12/2024
Fashion Faux Pas: 5 Ways Invisible Leadership Impedes Profitability / https://issuu.com/mannpublicationsmagazines/docs/nov_dec_2	Fashion Manuscript Magazine	11/2024
Promote respectful workplace communications with 10 actionable strategies October 2024 Vol. 39, No. 10 https://www.leadershipbriefings.com/	Leadership Briefings	10/2024
5 Ways 'Management Invisibility' Impedes Workforce Productivity / https://online.fliphtml5.com/pkbbx/ctjf/#p=8	Beverly Hills Times Magazine	9/2024
/ Unstoppable Woman Dares Executives to Lead with A Fierce Heart https://www.sherisesstudios.com/magazine	FENIX Innovation Magazine	8/2024
Unstoppable Woman Dares Executives to Lead with A Fierce Heart / https://www.sherisesstudios.com/magazine	H.A.N.N.A. Magazine	8/2024
Why Quiet Firing Hurts Organizations and Leaders / https://online.fliphtml5.com/pkbbx/ctjf/#p=8	Beverly Hills Times Magazine	8/2024
4 Reasons 'Quiet Firing' Is Bad For Business / https://web.hr.com/d781	HR.com's HCM Sales, Marketing & Alliance Excellence	7/2024

Thinking About 'Quiet Firing' to Dump Unwanted Workers? Think Again. / https://www.pandcspecialist.com/c/4559274/601494/thinking_about_quiet_firing_dump_unwanted_workers_think_again?referrer_module=emailPeople&module_order=0&code=WTJobGNubHNMBtEXYm10QVpuUXVZMj0TENBNuSEWTJPVGN6TENBeEIERtNOamsxTmprMw	P&C Specialist	7/2024
Enhancing Organizational Success And Employee Fulfillment / https://www.hr.com/en/magazines/human_experience_excellence_at_work/july_2024_human_experience_excellence_at_work/enhancing-organizational-success-and-employee-fulfillment.html?utm_source=email&utm_campaign=url&utm_content=enhancingorganizationalsuccess	HR.com's Human Experience Excellence at Work	7/2024
How to handle promotions when there aren't enough leadership roles / https://www.fastcompany.com/91230700/how-to-handle-promotions-when-there-arent-enough-leadership-roles	Fast Company	11/2024
What's Urgency Culture — And Is It Worthwhile at All? / https://cake.com/empowered-team/urgency-culture/	Cake.com	10/2024
How Visionary Leaders Keep Teams Focused On Short-Term Goals and Long-Term Vision / https://highnetworthmag.com/teams-short-term-goals-long-term-vision/	High Net Worth Magazine	10/2024:
/ Improve Employee Morale With These 4 Tips / https://clockify.me/blog/workforce-management/improve-employee-morale/	Clockify	10/2024:
Can leadership be taught? / https://brand-studio.fortune.com/featured/can-leadership-be-taught/?prx_t=LsJAAAAAovEQA	Fortune	9/2024:
Job Interview Red Flags To watch for, According to Hiring Experts https://www.newsweek.com/biggest-job-interview-red-flags-hr-experts-career-advice-reddit-1956176 • Pickups: - o https://www.newsobserver.com/living/article292730434.html - o https://www.charlotteobserver.com/living/article292730434.html - o https://www.theolympian.com/living/article292730434.html - o https://www.fresnobee.com/living/article292730434.html - o https://www.sacbee.com/entertainment/living/article292730434.html - o https://www.brandon.com/living/article292730434.html - o https://www.mercedsunstar.com/living/article292730434.html	Newsweek	9/2024

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Cost of Invisible Leadership: 5 Ways Management Disengagement Impedes Profitability / https://www.americanindustrialmagazine.com/blogs/industry/cost-of-invisible-leadership-5-ways-management-disengagement-impedes-profitability	American Industrial Magazine	9/2024
Guarding The Future Of Work: How To Create A Culture That Protects Whistleblowers / https://allwork.space/2024/09/guarding-the-future-of-work-how-to-create-a-culture-that-protects-whistleblowers/	All Work	9/2024
What Job Seekers Should Know Before Accepting an Offer / https://www.corporatevision-news.com/what-job-seekers-should-know-before-accepting-an-offer/	Corporate Vision	9/2024
The Executive Dilemma: Will Reducing Responsibilities and Taking a Pay Cut Bring Bliss? / https://www.ceo-review.com/the-executive-dilemma-will-reducing-responsibilities-and-taking-a-pay-cut-bring-bliss/	CEO Monthly	9/2024
Key to Building Trust in Remote Teams / https://www.ceo-review.com/key-to-building-trust-in-remote-teams/	CEO Monthly	9/2024
5 Ways 'Management Invisibility' Impedes Workforce Productivity / https://www.ceo-review.com/5-ways-management-invisibility-impedes-workforce-productivity/	CEO Monthly	9/2024:
5 Ways 'Management Invisibility' Impedes Workforce Productivity / https://online.fliphtml5.com/pkbbx/ctjf/#p=8	Beverly Hills Times Magazine	9/2024
How Leaders Should Choose Their Second in Command / https://www.ceo-review.com/how-leaders-should-choose-their-second-in-command/	CEO Monthly	8/2024

5 Ways 'Management Invisibility' Impedes Workforce Productivity / https://www.lifehealth.com/5-ways-management-invisibility-impedes-workforce-productivity/	Advisor Magazine	8/2024
Should CEOs Put People Above Profits? / https://www.ceo-review.com/should-ceos-put-people-above-profits/	CEO Monthly	8/2024
5 Ways 'Management Invisibility' Impedes Workforce Productivity / https://finchannel.com/5-ways-management-invisibility-impedes-workforce-productivity/122263/opinion/2024/08/	Financial Channel	8/2024
How Employee Wage Compression Impacts a Company / https://www.corporatevision-news.com/how-employee-wage-compression-impacts-a-company/	Corporate Vision	8/2024
/ New Book Dares Leaders to Relate & Lead With a Fierce Heart / https://wemagazineforwomen.com/new-book-dares-leaders-to-relate-lead-with-a-fierce-heart/	WE Business & Lifestyle Magazine for Women	8/2024
There's a double-edged sword high performers face at work, and it's costing employers their talent / https://americanceo.club/theres-a-double-edged-sword-high-performers-face-at-work-and-its-costing-employers-their-talent/	American CEO Club	8/2024
There's a double-edged sword high-performers face at work, and it's costing employers their talent / https://www.businessinsider.com/double-edged-sword-high-performers-face-at-work-feedback-managers-2024-8	Business Insider	8/2024
What Constitutes a 'Bad' vs. 'Good' Employee? / https://www.corporatevision-news.com/what-constitutes-a-bad-vs-good-employee/	Corporate Vision	8/2024
Promoting Meaningful Connection in the Workplace / https://www.corporatevision-news.com/promoting-meaningful-connection-in-the-workplace/	Corporate Vision	8/2024
From Critique to Confidence: How Employee Feedback Fosters Stronger Companies / https://www.corporatevision-news.com/from-critique-to-confidence-how-employee-feedback-fosters-stronger-companies/	Corporate Vision	8/2024
From Critique to Confidence: How Employee Feedback Fosters Stronger Restaurants / https://modernrestaurantmanagement.com/from-critique-to-confidence-how-employee-feedback-fosters-stronger-restaurants/	Modern Restaurant Management	8/2024
Why Relational Leadership Trumps Other Management Styles / https://www.americanindustrialmagazine.com/blogs/manufacturing-technology/why-relational-leadership-trumps-other-management-styles	American Industrial Magazine	8/2024
How Employee Feedback Fosters Stronger Restaurant Operations / https://www.iwaymagazine.com/blogs/foodies/how-employee-feedback-fosters-stronger-restaurant-operations	iWay Magazine	7/2024

Manager-Employee Trust Increasingly in Turmoil / https://www.ceo-review.com/manager-employee-trust-increasingly-in-turmoil/	CEO Monthly	7/2024
Enhancing Organizational Success Through Employee Fulfillment / https://www.corporatevision-news.com/enhancing-organizational-success-through-employee-fulfillment/	Corporate Vision	7/2024
From Critique to Confidence: How Employee Feedback Fosters Stronger Companies / https://www.themommiesreviews.com/from-critique-to-confidence-how-employee-feedback-fosters-stronger-companies/	The Mommies Reviews	7/2024
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Who's That Team Member Who Gives You Grief? / https://www.joinos.org/post/who-s-that-team-member-who-gives-you-grief	SOS	7/2024
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Why Relational Leadership Trumps Other Management Styles / https://www.themommiesreviews.com/why-relational-leadership-trumps-other-management-styles/	The Mommies Reviews	7/2024
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HR.com's HCM Sales, Marketing & Alliance Excellence / 4 Reasons 'Quiet Firing' Is Bad For Business / https://www.hr.com/en/magazines/hcm_sales_marketing_alliance_excellence_essentials/july_2024_hcm_sales_marketing_alliance_excellence/4-reasons-%E2%80%98quiet-firing%E2%80%99-is-bad-for-business_jvgzc3my.html?utm_source=email&utm_campaign=ur&utm_content=4	HR.com	7/2024
Are Return to Work Mandates Wise? / https://www.informationweek.com/it-leadership/are-return-to-work-mandates-wise-	Information Week	7/2024
Thinking About 'Quiet Firing' to Dump Unwanted Workers? Think Again. / https://www.pandcspecialist.com/c/4559274/601494/thinking_about_quiet_firing_dump_unwanted_workers_think_again?referr	P&C Specialist	7/2024

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New Book Dares Leaders to Relate & Lead With a Fierce Heart / https://theamberpost.com/post/new-book-dares-leaders-to-relate-lead-with-a-fierce-heart	The Amber Post	7/2024
New Book Dares Luxury Sector Leaders to Relate & Lead With a Fierce Heart / https://www.justluxe.com/luxe-insider/trends/feature-1978339.php	Just Luxe	7/2024
4 Reasons 'Quiet Firing' is Bad for Business / https://www.themommiesreviews.com/4-reasons-quiet-firing-is-bad-for-business/	The Mommies Reviews	7/2024
New Book Dares Leaders to Relate & Lead With a Fierce Heart / https://socpub.com/articles/new-book-dares-leaders-relate-lead-fierce-heart-17947	socPub	7/2024
New Book Dares Leaders to Relate & Lead With a Fierce Heart / https://original.newsbreak.com/@merilee-kern-mba-1702269/3513339499203-new-book-dares-leaders-to-relate-lead-with-a-fierce-heart	Newsbreak	7/2024
New Book Dares Leaders to Relate & Lead With a Fierce Heart / https://yournews.com/2024/07/02/2811431/new-book-dares-leaders-to-relate-lead-with-a/	[your]News	7/2024
New Book Dares Tech Sector Leaders to Relate & Lead With a Fierce Heart / https://www.gadgetgram.com/2024/07/02/new-book-dares-tech-sector-leaders-to-relate-lead-with-a-fierce-heart/	Gadget Gram	7/2024
New Book Dares Leaders to Relate & Lead With a Fierce Heart / https://www.authortalking.com/new-book-dares-leaders-to-relate-lead-with-a-fierce-heart/	Author Talking	7/2024

Book Review: Cannabis sector must relate, lead with a 'fierce heart' / https://www.theleafonline.com/c/business/2024/07/new-book-dares-cannabis-sector-leaders-to-relate-lead-with-a-fierce-heart/	The Leaf Online	7/2024
New Book Dares Leaders to Relate & Lead With a Fierce Heart / https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/new-book-dares-leaders-relate-lead-fierce-heart-merilee-kern-mba-lbcwe/	LinkedIn Pulse	7/2024
New Book Dares Luxury Sector Leaders to Relate & Lead With a Fierce Heart / https://luxurylifestyle.com/headlines/new-book-dares-luxury-sector-leaders-to-relate-lead-with-a-fierce-heart.html	Luxury Lifestyle	7/2024
New Book Dares Leaders to Relate & Lead With a Fierce Heart / https://thefloridavillager.com/2024/07/new-book-dares-leaders-to-relate-lead-with-a-fierce-heart/	The Florida Villager	7/2024
New Book Dares F&B Sector Leaders to Relate & Lead With a Fierce Heart / https://www.fb101.com/new-book-dares-fb-sector-leaders-to-relate-lead-with-a-fierce-heart/	Food & Beverage Magazine	7/2024
New Book Dares Leaders to Relate & Lead With a Fierce Heart / https://thesuitcaselife.com/explore/f/new-book-dares-leaders-to-relate-lead-with-a-fierce-heart	The Suitcase Life	7/2024
New Book Dares Leaders to Relate & Lead With a Fierce Heart / https://luxelistreviews.com/new-book-dares-leaders-to-relate-lead-with-a-fierce-heart/	The Luxe List	7/2024
New Book Dares Leaders to Relate & Lead With a Fierce Heart / https://finchannel.com/new-book-dares-leaders-to-relate-lead-with-a-fierce-heart/121291/book-review/2024/07/	Financial Channel	7/2024
The Executive Dilemma: Will Reducing Responsibilities and Taking a Pay Cut Bring Bliss? / https://finchannel.com/the-executive-dilemma-will-reducing-responsibilities-and-taking-a-pay-cut-bring-bliss/121162/opinion/2024/06/	Financial Channel	6/2024
Here's How Remote Managers Build Trust in Their Teams / https://cake.com/empowered-team/remote-teams-building-trust/	CAKE.com	6/2024
Beyond Inc. executive team changes as leadership roles are consolidated / https://www.digitalcommerce360.com/2024/06/19/beyond-inc-executive-team-leadership-roles-consolidated/	Digital Commerce 360	6/2024
Relational Leadership Makes a Real Difference / https://www.themeetingmagazines.com/ifmm/relational-leadership-makes-real-difference/	TheMeetingMagazines.com: Insurance & Financial Meetings Management	6/2024
What Job Seekers Should Know Before Accepting an Offer / https://www.careerbright.com/job-search-tips/what-job-seekers-should-know-before-accepting-an-offer	Career Bright	6/2024
Enhancing Organizational Success Through Employee Fulfillment / https://www.innovativehumancapital.com/post/enhancing-organizational-success-through-employee-fulfillment	Human Capital Innovations	6/2024

Leaders Can 'Kill' People's Confidence / https://communicationintelligence.substack.com/p/leaders-can-kill-peoples-confidence	Communication Intelligence	6/2024
Why Relational Leadership Makes a Real Difference / https://www.iwaymagazine.com/blogs/news/why-relational-leadership-makes-a-real-difference	iWay Magazine	6/2024
4 Reasons 'Quiet Firing' is Bad for Business / https://www.americanindustrialmagazine.com/blogs/industry/4-reasons-quiet-firing-is-bad-for-business	American Industrial Magazine	6/2024
4 Reasons 'Quiet Firing' is Bad for the Tech Industry / https://thesupdesk.com/4-reasons-quiet-firing-is-bad-for-the-tech-industry/?doing_wp_cron=1717508953.5921640396118164062500	TheSupDesk.com	5/2024
4 Reasons 'Quiet Firing' is Bad Taste for F&B Businesses / https://www.fb101.com/4-reasons-quiet-firing-is-bad-taste-for-fb-businesses/	Food & Beverage Magazine	5/2024
4 Reasons 'Quiet Firing' is Bad for Business / https://energycentral.com/c/hr/4-reasons-%E2%80%99quiet-firing%E2%80%99-bad-business	Energy Central	5/2024
4 Reasons 'Quiet Firing' is Bad for Business / https://wemagazineforwomen.com/4-reasons-quiet-firing-is-bad-for-business/	WE magazine for women	5/2024
4 Reasons 'Quiet Firing' is Bad for Business / https://original.newsbreak.com/@merilee-kern-mba-1702269/3456467769819-4-reasons-quiet-firing-is-bad-for-business	Newsbreak	5/2024
4 Reasons 'Quiet Firing' is Bad for Business / https://finchannel.com/4-reasons-quiet-firing-is-bad-for-business/119992/jobs/2024/05/	The Financial Channel	5/2024
4 Reasons 'Quiet Firing' is Bad for the Tech Industry / https://www.gadgetgram.com/2024/05/22/4-reasons-quiet-firing-is-bad-for-the-tech-industry/	Gadget Gram	5/2024
4 Reasons 'Quiet Firing' is Bad for Business / https://thefloridavillager.com/2024/05/4-reasons-quiet-firing-is-bad-for-business/	The Florida Villager	5/2024
4 Reasons 'Quiet Firing' is Bad for Business / https://theluxelist.medium.com/4-reasons-quiet-firing-is-bad-for-business-b3354796b5c0	Medium	5/2024
Reasons 'Quiet Firing' is Bad for Business / https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/4-reasons-quiet-firing-bad-business-merilee-kern-mba-ddqde/	LinkedIn Pulse	5/2024
Reasons 'Quiet Firing' is Bad for Business / https://yournews.com/2024/05/22/2790161/4-reasons-quiet-firing-is-bad-for-business/	[your]News	5/2024
4 Reasons 'Quiet Firing' is Bad for Business / https://luxelistreviews.com/4-reasons-quiet-firing-is-bad-for-business/	The Luxe List	5/2024

The Power Behind Authentic Connections https://www.onu.edu/news/power-behind-authentic-connections	Ohio Northern University	3/2024
Hotel Crisis Management: Turning a Big Ship in Rough Waters https://www.hotelexecutive.com/feature_focus/8029/hotel-crisis-management-turning-a-big-ship-in-rough-waters	Hotel Business Review	9/2024
Veterans Appeals Modernization: Choice, Control, and Clarity for Veterans – print magazine	Nebraska Lawyer Magazine	September 2020
What Hotel Job Seekers Consider Before Accepting an Offer https://www.hotelexecutive.com/feature_focus/8117/what-hotel-job-seekers-consider-before-accepting-an-offer	Hotel Business Review	12/2024

8. Public Statements

(A) List any testimony, official statements or other communications, including those made on the Internet including on social media or other digital content sites, relating to matters of public policy that you have issued or provided or that others presented on your behalf to public bodies or officials.

VA Appeals Program: Examining the State of Modernization Efforts, 13 July 2021, House Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs

Is VA Ready for Full Implementation of Appeals Reform?, 12 December 2018, House Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Fiscal Year 2019 Budget: Veterans Benefits Administration and the Board of Veterans' Appeals, 15 March 2018, House Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs

House Hearing on Appeals Reform: Will VA's Implementation Effectively Serve Veterans? 30 January 2018, House Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs

U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, hearing to consider pending nominations. <https://www.veterans.senate.gov/2017/10/pending-nominations-10042017>

(B) List any speeches or talks delivered by you, including commencement speeches, remarks, lectures, panel discussions, conferences, political speeches, and question-and-answer sessions. Include the dates and places where such speeches or talks were given.

Keynote Address: "Purpose, Impact, Value"© North Carolina Association of County Veterans Service Officers Fall Conference, 3 October 2023, Harrah's Cherokee Casino Resort, Cherokee NC

Book Tour: "Dare to Relate: Leading with a Fierce Heart"©
Medina County Veterans Services, 10 April 2024, Medina OH
Butler County Veterans Services, 12 April 2024, Middletown OH
Ohio Northern University, 15 April 2024, Ada OH
Hancock County Chamber of Commerce, Women's Leadership Forum, 17 April 2024, Findley OH
Army Navy Country Club, 11 May 2024, Arlington VA

American Legion Post 139, 16 May 2024, Arlington VA
Country Bookstore, 21 May 2024, Southern Pines NC

Keynote Address: "The Secret Ingredient to Success"©, National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA) Veterans Conference, 8 August 2024 Washington DC

Keynote Address: "The Secret Ingredient to Success"©, United States Veterans Memorial and Museum (USVMM), Veteran Employee Resource Group (VERG) Summit, 19 September 2024 Columbus OH

Keynote Address, "Dare to Relate"©, North Caroline Association of Women Attorneys Annual Conference, 27 September 2024, Raleigh Marriott Crabtree, Raleigh NC

Annual Training Seminar: "Veterans Claims - The Good, the Bad, the Ugly"©, Illinois Association of County Veterans Assistance Commissions (IACVAC), 17 September 2024, Peoria IL

Annual Training Seminar: "Veterans Claims - The Good, the Bad, the Ugly"©, Moore County Veterans Service, , 17 September 2024, Carthage NC

Panel Discussion: "Service and Law: Navigation Careers Across Sectors", The Bar Association of Metropolitan St Louis, 15 October 2024, St Louis MO

Seminar: "Relational Leadership Engagement Toolbox Series"©, Military Spouse Leadership Development Program Alumni, Military Spouse Advocacy Network, 20 November 2024 virtual

(C) List all interviews you have given to newspapers, magazines or other publications, and radio or television stations (including the dates of such interviews).

NBC WCNC-TV "Charlotte Today" 9 July 2024 Charlotte. NC
<https://www.wcnc.com/article/entertainment/television/charlotte-today/leadership-is-about-heart-connection-sponsored-by-theluxelistcom/275-dac18c51-9d4b-4079-a9bb-b93501836674>

Donna Seebo | Delphi Vision International Inc WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP - Special Editions - Episode 12, 30 August 2024
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MMJt9Jo6LHI&list=TLGGEB-G3TTU_sxNjAzMjAvNQ

The Doug Wagner Show NewsRadio 600 WMT Cedar Rapids IA 17 June 2024

Podcasts:

Tedx Talks = The Secret Ingredient to Leadership© | Cheryl L. Mason

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XZkWGaiYs9A>

#12minconvo Podcast

[Cheryl Mason: The Invisible Leader: How She Found Power in Co](#)

Veterans Helping Veterans (VHV) Dr Paul Lawrence:

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/drpaullawrence_leadership-masters-class-there-is-a-common-activity-7245418530207145984-aTsD?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop

<https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7237799201009463297/?origin=TrackingId=KfJvkkH%2FSm2%2FrpK4dzg6kQ%3D%3D>

<https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7216789491703840770/?origin=TrackingId=qYncuXKLtuO2r8gj3xuaYQ%3D%3D>

SharkPreneur: Seth Greene and Kevin Harrington -- 1080: Dare to Relate: Overcoming Life's Challenges

<https://youtu.be/1sCx1ejA1NA?list=TLGG0A0WESZgcksxNzAzMjAyNQ>

Synovation Live 2024

<https://vimeo.com/930287531>

The Derek Duvall Show, Episode 236: The Honorable Cheryl Mason- Former Chairman of the Department of Veterans Affairs Board of Veterans Appeals

<https://www.listennotes.com/podcasts/the-derek-duvall/episode-236-the-honorable-CJhi49pqO-/>

Behind the Mission Episode #145 Cheri Mason = VA Board of Veterans Appeals

<https://psvcharmorm.org/podcast/cheri-mason>

The Truths We Hide, Episode 145 with the Honorable Cheryl Mason

<https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/episode-145-with-honorable-cheryl-mason/id1492522285?i=1000638724242>

On Kindness: Catalyst Leadership with Cheryl Mason

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/3xvetEfZT4f2o2I25NXStf?si=RRu2np0nQCaaFPcd0z8reA>

Meeting You Where You're At Podcast Episode #88 Cheryl Mason

<https://soundcloud.com/meetingyouwhereyoueat/ep-88-cheryl-mason>

Story Samurai: Cheryl Mason, <https://podcasts.apple.com/it/podcast/cheryl-mason-aug-28-2024/id1750146701?i=1000666951735>

Million Dollar Nonprofit:

Navigating Leadership Challenges in Nonprofits, Jul 23 2024

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SnYGxmF-wHk>

Soraya - Be Convinced! Sharing Lifechanging Stories of Hope, Episode #193

Author and Speaker Cheryl Mason Shares Her Passion of Innovative Leadership Development <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/ep-193-author-and-speaker-cheryl-mason-shares-her/id1548547742?i=1000669662133>

Dian Griesel, Ph.D. = Perception Dynamics: Redefining Perspectives, Transforming Results

Cheryl Mason, J.D.: Breaking Barriers in Women's Leadership

<https://spotifycreators-web.app.link/e/WVLIUGOOuOb>

Return To Authenticity: Leading with a Fierce Heart with Cheri Mason | EP93

<https://www.buzzsprout.com/1938257/episodes/15146124-leading-with-a-fierce-heart-with-cheri-mason-ep93>

S.O.S. podcast Episode #119 Transformative leadership | Cheri Mason –

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8JK_yDBHM

The Derek Duvall Show Episode 236: The Honorable Cheryl Mason - Former Chairman of the Board of Veterans' Appeals

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/episode-236-the-honorable-cheryl-mason-former/id1533178349?i=1000648740003>

un-CAPP it Podcast Mental Health in the Workplace

<https://creators.spotify.com/pod/show/un-cappit/episodes/Mental-Health-in-the-Workplace-e2imhab/a-ab6lkde>

The Donna Seebo Show: Honorable Cheryl Mason

<http://64.131.95.13:2197/ondemand/donnaseeboshow/3633%20Jul%2024%202024%20Wed%20Honorable%20Cheryl%20Mason-Donna%20Seebo%20Show-PR%20min.rec0621-100520.mp3>

Breaking Barriers Podcast: Cheryl Mason's Journey of Leadership, Resilience, and Advocacy in the Veteran Community

<https://www.iheart.com/podcast/269-is-your-way-in-your-way-112161060/episode/breaking-barriers-cheryl-masons-journey-of-207889532/>

9. Agreements or Arrangements

☒ See OGE Form 278. (If, for your nomination, you have completed an OGE Form 278 Executive Branch Personnel Public Financial Disclosure Report, you may check the box here to complete this section and then proceed to the next section.)

As of the date of filing your OGE Form 278, report your agreements or arrangements for: (1) continuing participation in an employee benefit plan (e.g. pension, 401k, deferred compensation); (2) continuation of payment by a former employer (including severance payments); (3) leaves of absence; and (4) future employment.

Provide information regarding any agreements or arrangements you have concerning (1) future employment; (2) a leave of absence during your period of Government service; (3) continuation of payments by a former employer other than the United States Government; and (4) continuing participation in an employee welfare or benefit plan maintained by a former employer other than United States Government retirement benefits.

<u>Status and Terms of Any Agreement or Arrangement</u>	<u>Parties</u>	<u>Date</u> (month/year)
None		

10. Lobbying

Have you ever registered as a lobbyist? If so, please indicate the state, federal, or local bodies with which you have registered (e.g., House, Senate, California Secretary of State).

No

11. Testifying Before the Congress

(A) Do you agree to appear and testify before any duly constituted committee of the Congress upon the request of such Committee?

Yes

(B) Do you agree to provide such information as is requested by such a committee in a timely and accurate manner?

Yes

**Nomination Material for
DON BERGIN**

Don Bergin - Opening Statement Before the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee

Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Blumenthal, and distinguished Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am deeply honored by the confidence President Trump and Secretary Collins have placed in me to be considered for the position of Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Senator Cornyn, thank you for introducing me today. It was a pleasure to serve alongside you as we worked to improve the lives of our nation's Veterans and achieve the national security and foreign policy goals of our nation. You and Sandy are truly the best of Texas.

Finally, I want to express my deepest gratitude to my wife, Grace, whose unwavering support has made it possible for me to serve in this role. I also want to thank my mother, who served a quarter century as a military spouse, raising three children with strength and resilience—instilling in me the values that guide my public service today.

The veteran community is my community. I view veterans the same way many of you view the constituents of your respective states.

I was born into the Army, just up the street from here at Walter Reed Hospital. The son of a West Point graduate, I was raised among Vietnam veterans. From an early age, I witnessed firsthand the

stigmas and challenges they faced in the community and in seeking care from the VA—struggling with limited access to mental health support, archaic prosthetic services, and a system that often failed to meet their needs. Their resilience shaped my understanding of duty, sacrifice, and the lasting impacts of war.

My family's legacy of service runs deep. Both of my grandfathers served in World War II—one in the Army and the other as a B-17 navigator flying the infamous missions over Germany. My father spent nearly 25 years in the Army, retiring as a Colonel. He is buried at West Point. My sister is a VA physician. My wife, Grace, is a federal employee.

As a military brat, I experienced the sacrifices service members and their families make—moving every few years, making and losing friends, and constantly adapting. Profoundly impacted by the September 11th attacks, I immediately walked into the Marine Corps recruiting office. I was honored to join the first class following 9/11—a diverse group of Americans from Wall Street to Main Street, united by a shared commitment to our country. As an infantry commander, I deployed with the 1st Marine Division during the invasion of Iraq, where my unit helped tear down the statue of Saddam Hussein. I later served two consecutive combat deployments to Fallujah. I was privileged to stand with my fellow Marines, whose courage and sacrifice will always stay with me.

Again, the Veteran community is my community.

I began my service in Congress nearly twenty years ago in the Marine Corps Office of Legislative Affairs, gaining firsthand experience in

how critical congressional engagement is to advance the interests of our service members and veterans.

I went on to serve in personal offices, on congressional committees, and ultimately in Senate leadership as National Security Counsel to the Senate Majority Whip, Senator Cornyn—who was kind enough to provide my introduction today. Throughout these roles, I saw the undeniable truth: when Congress and the VA work together under a common purpose, we can deliver real, lasting results for the Veteran community and their families. Just reference the Post-9/11 GI Bill, MISSION Act, PACT Act, and Elizabeth Dole Act, to name a few. That collaboration must be honest, bipartisan, and always focused on the needs of those who have served.

This experience has prepared me to immediately strengthen that partnership and ensure the voices of veterans remain at the center of every policy and legislative decision.

That perspective is deeply personal. As a patient of the VA, I have witnessed the agency's transformation firsthand — from the struggles of the Vietnam era to the advancements made for the OIF and OEF generations. The progress in mental health care and prosthetic technology has been remarkable, but there is still more work to do. In recognition of veterans' extraordinary service, Congress has committed vast resources to honor our nation's promise to them. We have a shared duty to ensure those resources are used efficiently, effectively, and directly to improve veterans' care and benefits.

When the Secretary asked me to take on this role, I did not hesitate. It offers a rare opportunity to unite my experiences—from the

kitchen table, to the battlefield, and to Congress—to strengthen this critical partnership and ensure the voices of veterans are at the heart of every legislative conversation.

If confirmed, I will be a tireless advocate for veterans, committed to working hand-in-hand with Congress in a spirit of cooperation and shared purpose. Together, we can fulfill President Lincoln’s promise, to care for those who have borne the battle.

I will measure every action by a simple standard—am I delivering meaningful results and real accountability for the members of my community who sacrificed so much for this country.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to your questions.

Pre-Hearing Questions for Donald Bergin
Nominee for Assistant Secretary for the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs at the
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
From Senator Jerry Moran
Chairman, Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs

April 28, 2025

- 1. Please detail the professional and personal experiences that you believe have prepared you to help lead the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and explain your interest in serving in this particular position.**

The son of a West Point graduate, and a Marine Corps Officer, I believe I'm uniquely qualified for this role. My life has been shaped by service to the military and veteran communities. I was born into an Army family, and grew up seeing firsthand the challenges military families face. I heard first-hand from my father, and fellow Vietnam era veterans how they view the VA and the stigma of mental health. After 9/11, I joined the Marine Corps and served in three combat deployments, and later worked in the Marine Corps Office of Legislative Affairs, where I learned how critical it is to have strong partnerships with Congress to take care of our service members and veterans.

After my time in uniform, I worked on Capitol Hill — in both the House and Senate, in personal offices, on committees, and in leadership — giving me a broad understanding of how Congress works and what it takes to get things done for veterans. I'm also a VA patient myself. I've navigated both the VA benefits system and the health care system, so I understand on a personal level where we are succeeding and where we still need to do better.

Those experiences, both professional and personal, have prepared me to lead the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs with urgency, humility, and a deep commitment to making sure veterans get the support they've earned.

- 2. What do you think are the most significant challenges facing VA? If confirmed, what would your highest priorities be and what would you intend to accomplish to help address those challenges?**

One of the most significant challenges facing the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is the ongoing crisis of veteran suicide, compounded by barriers in timely access to mental health care. According to the VA's *2023 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report*, an average of 17 veterans die by suicide every day. While the overall veteran suicide rate decreased slightly between 2019 and 2021, it remains significantly higher than the general U.S. adult population. Access to mental health services continues to be uneven, particularly in rural areas, where approximately one-third of veterans reside and where provider shortages are most severe.

If confirmed, I share the Secretary's prioritization of suicide prevention, expanding access to care, and strengthening mental health infrastructure. Specifically, I would work with the Secretary and Congress to:

- Communicate VA's accelerated implementation of same-day access to mental health evaluations across all VA medical centers and community-based outpatient clinics.
- Expand partnerships under the *COMPACT Act* to ensure veterans in crisis can access emergency mental health care without cost or enrollment barriers.
- Provide regular updates regarding targeted recruitment and retention initiatives for mental health professionals, with special incentives for serving rural and underserved areas.
- Work with Congress to strengthen community-based partnerships, ensuring veterans have access to a broader network of vetted, high-quality mental health providers when VA capacity is exceeded.

Addressing these challenges is not only urgent but achievable. My intent would be to help the Secretary and Congress drive measurable reductions in suicide rates, close geographic and systemic access gaps, and build a VA that every veteran can rely on — especially in moments of crisis.

3. What do you think is the appropriate role of VA in an average veteran's life and, if confirmed, how would you work to improve outcomes among the veterans, caregivers, survivors, and others who use VA health care, benefits, and services?

The Department of Veterans Affairs' mission, as stated, is "to fulfill President Lincoln's promise — '*To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan*' — by serving and honoring the men and women who are America's veterans." I believe the VA's appropriate role in an average veteran's life is to be a trusted, accessible partner — providing not only high-quality health care and benefits but also ensuring that veterans, their caregivers, and survivors are treated with dignity, compassion, and respect. The VA should stand ready to meet veterans where they are — whether they need intensive clinical support, help transitioning to civilian life, or assistance navigating earned benefits later in life.

If confirmed, I would work tirelessly to improve outcomes for veterans, caregivers, survivors, and other beneficiaries by focusing on three primary areas:

- **Implementing Key Legislation:** I would prioritize helping to fully and faithfully implement major recent laws like the *Elizabeth Dole Home- and Community-Based Services for Veterans and Caregivers Act* — which expands services and support for caregivers — and the *PACT Act* — which extends health care and benefits for veterans exposed to toxic substances. Proper implementation of these landmark reforms is critical to restoring trust and delivering the care veterans deserve.
- **Enhancing Access and Quality:** I would help drive initiatives to modernize VA health care delivery, reduce wait times, expand telehealth and community care networks, and ensure that VA programs are culturally competent and accessible to all eligible populations, including rural and underserved veterans.
- **Partnering with Congress and Stakeholders:** Recognizing that veterans' needs continue to evolve, I would work closely with Congress, Veterans Service Organizations, and other stakeholders to identify emerging challenges and advocate for policies that strengthen VA services. This includes ensuring the VA remains adequately resourced and agile enough to meet the demands of new generations of veterans.

Ultimately, my commitment would be to uphold the VA's sacred mission and continuously strive for a system that honors veterans not only through words but through action and measurable results.

- 4. If the Secretary, the White House, the Office of Management and Budget, the Office of Personnel Management, or other official entities are working on or issue a directive or guidance that you believe violates the law or could have an adverse impact on services and benefits for veterans, caregivers, and survivors, what would you do?**

I do not anticipate ever receiving any directions or guidance that matches this description. I will follow the law.

- 5. Please describe your understanding of the purpose of the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs. If confirmed, do you anticipate making any changes to such purpose? If so, how and why? If not, why not?**

The Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs (OCLA) serves as the principal office within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) responsible for coordinating, facilitating, and managing the Department's interactions with Congress. According to the official description, OCLA's purpose is to "advocate for veterans and their families by ensuring that Congress is informed of the VA's programs, policies, and legislative initiatives." OCLA acts as the primary liaison between the VA and both chambers of Congress, ensuring that members and their staff are provided timely, accurate, and comprehensive information regarding VA activities, priorities, and needs.

My understanding of OCLA's mission is that it plays a critical role in advancing the VA's legislative priorities, securing necessary resources through the appropriations process, and facilitating oversight in a way that supports transparency and accountability. OCLA also assists in the development and presentation of the Department's legislative proposals, manages responses to congressional inquiries, and supports VA leadership during testimony before congressional committees.

If confirmed, I would view the Office's role not only as a communication channel but as a strategic partner to Congress — ensuring that lawmakers have the information they need to craft legislation that improves the lives of veterans, while also advocating internally to ensure the VA's programs are responsive to congressional intent and evolving veteran needs.

If confirmed, I would fully adhere to the responsibilities and purpose of the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs as described above. Based on my experience working both in government and directly with Congress, I recognize the critical importance of ensuring that the Department's communications with Congress are not only accurate and comprehensive but also timely and responsive to the needs of members and their staff. I would work to strengthen the Office's responsiveness by emphasizing both the substance and timeliness of all interactions and submissions, ensuring that responses are delivered with clarity, thoroughness, and urgency. Importantly, I would approach this responsibility in a nonpartisan manner — committed to providing high-quality support and information to all members of Congress, regardless of political party, in fulfillment of the VA's mission to serve veterans, their families, and survivors.

6. Please describe your understanding of the organizational structure of the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs. If confirmed, do you anticipate making any changes to such structure? If so, how and why? If not, why not?

The Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs (OCLA) is organized to ensure comprehensive engagement with Congress. It is structured with staff assigned specifically to support the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees. The remainder of the staff work directly with non-committee members, addressing their legislative needs, inquiries, and interests. Additionally, a separate team focuses on casework, ensuring that individual veteran concerns raised by members of Congress are appropriately and promptly addressed.

If confirmed, I would work within this overall structure but would seek to enhance its effectiveness by pairing career staff, who bring deep institutional experience, with political appointees, who are closely aligned with the Secretary's current policy priorities. I would also implement multiple layers of accountability to ensure that responses to Congress are timely, substantive, and coordinated across VA's various administrations and offices. Finally, I would add a dedicated coordination function responsible for systematically tracking congressional requests, ensuring follow-through, and identifying parallel interests and opportunities across VA business lines and between the House and Senate. This would strengthen both proactive engagement and strategic alignment with Congress, ultimately supporting the Department's mission to better serve veterans.

7. Have you discussed the duties, responsibilities, and expectations for the Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs with Secretary Collins? If so, what specific priorities and expectations were discussed and how would you measure success, if confirmed?

Yes, I have discussed the duties, responsibilities, and expectations for the Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs with Secretary Collins. In those discussions, we focused on the need to improve internal efficiencies within the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs so that more of the Department's time and resources can be directed toward enhancing the quality of care at VA hospitals and ensuring veterans receive the benefits they've earned—promptly and with dignity.

Secretary Collins has made clear his commitment to several key priorities for veterans: expanding access to mental health care and suicide prevention services, eliminating homelessness among veterans, accelerating claims processing—including for toxic exposure cases under the PACT Act—and modernizing VA's infrastructure and electronic health records. Our conversations emphasized the need for the legislative team to be a force multiplier in advancing these priorities by maintaining strong, bipartisan relationships with Congress and responding quickly and thoroughly to congressional oversight.

If confirmed, I would measure success by how effectively OCLA enables timely, candid engagement with Congress, reduces internal response timelines, and helps advance legislation and oversight efforts that lead to tangible improvements in care, benefits, and outcomes for veterans. Ultimately, our mission

is to ensure that veterans experience the full impact of Secretary Collins' vision through coordinated legislative action and accountability.

8. What do you see as the role of this Committee, specifically, and Congressional oversight, in general?

The Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC) plays a critical role in relation to the VA Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs (OCLA). As one of the primary authorizing committees for the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee is responsible for overseeing the VA's programs, considering legislation that affects veterans and their families, and ensuring that the Department is held accountable for delivering high-quality services. OCLA serves as the principal liaison between the VA and the Committee, facilitating communication, transmitting information, supporting hearings and briefings, and ensuring that the VA's views are effectively presented to Congress.

Congressional oversight is an essential component of good governance, and it ultimately strengthens the VA's ability to fulfill its mission. If confirmed, I would ensure that OCLA works with the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee — and all committees of jurisdiction — as a constructive partner, committed to transparency, responsiveness, and a shared goal of improving outcomes for veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors.

9. If confirmed, would you commit to meeting regularly with Committee staff to provide updates on the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs' efforts and actions?

Yes. If confirmed, I would commit to meeting regularly with committee staff to provide updates on the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs' efforts and actions.

10. If confirmed, would you commit to supporting regular briefings, upon request, for Committee staff with key VA offices, entities, and stakeholders?

Yes. If confirmed, I would fully commit to supporting regular briefings upon request for committee staff with key VA offices, entities, and stakeholders.

11. As a Congressional staffer working on issues impacting military and veteran communities, what was your experience working with the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs and how would that experience inform your work as the Assistant Secretary and your vision for sharing information with Congress, if confirmed?

As a congressional staffer working on issues affecting the military and veteran communities, I was often disappointed in the lack of timeliness and substance in the responses provided by the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs. Too often, information was delayed or lacked the depth needed for effective oversight and policymaking. If confirmed, I would work to ensure that responses to Congress are provided in a timely manner and that they are substantially complete, thorough, and helpful. My experience on the congressional side has given me a clear understanding of the urgency and

level of detail that Congress needs to effectively support veterans, and I would make it a priority to improve both the responsiveness, and the quality of the information provided by the Administrations and VA Staff Offices.

12. What is your current understanding of the timeliness and accuracy of VA's responses to requests for information from Congressional offices and, if confirmed, what strategies would you use to improve the timeliness and accuracy of such responses?

My current understanding is that the timelines for the VA's responses to congressional requests for information are often too long. Delays and incomplete information can undermine trust and hinder the VA's ability to work effectively with Congress.

If confirmed, I would implement a strategy focused on layered accountability within the organizational structure of the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs. This would include clearly defined responsibilities at multiple levels to ensure that requests are tracked, reviewed, and completed in a timely and accurate manner. I would also create a dedicated position tasked with coordinating information across different lines of business within the VA, ensuring that complex or cross-cutting requests are handled more efficiently and comprehensively. Additionally, I would incorporate a modern digital tracking tool that monitors the status of all congressional requests for information — providing real-time visibility into pending items, deadlines, responsible offices, and response quality checks. These steps would create a more accountable, and responsive system to better serve Congress and ultimately, veterans.

13. If confirmed, what strategies would you use to improve VA's working relationships with Senators and Members of Congress as well as with relevant Committee and congressional staff? Additionally, what strategies would you use to improve OCLA's working relationships within the Department in order to provide Congress with the best information as expediently as possible?

If confirmed, I would approach working with Congress by treating Committees and Members as customers representing the veterans in their states and districts. Congress serves as the voice of veterans nationwide, and the VA must respond with the urgency, respect, and service that responsibility demands. To improve relationships, I would increase staffing focused specifically on both the House and the Senate to enhance accessibility and ensure that every office receives timely, substantive support. I would also strengthen our legislative team supporting committee requests, ensuring that committee staff are provided detailed, accurate, and responsive information without undue delay.

To improve the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs' (OCLA) relationships within the Department, I would foster a culture of collaboration and shared accountability. This would include establishing clear internal communication channels, building cross-office teams for complex requests, and setting strict internal deadlines to expedite the flow of information to Congress. By strengthening both our external relationships with Congress and our internal coordination within the VA, OCLA can deliver better, faster, and more effective service — ultimately ensuring that veterans' needs remain at the center of everything we do.

Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record
Nomination of Donald Bergin to be Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs
Department of Veterans Affairs
From Ranking Member Richard Blumenthal

1. Why are you seeking the position of Assistant Secretary of Congressional and Legislative Affairs (OCLA) for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)?

I am seeking the position of Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs at the Department of Veterans Affairs because this role brings together every chapter of my personal and professional life in service to a mission I care deeply about. The son of a West Point graduate, I was born into an Army family and grew up facing the challenges experienced by military families. I heard first-hand from my father, and fellow Vietnam era veterans, how they view the VA and the stigma of mental health. After 9/11, I joined the Marine Corps and served in the 1st Marine Division's initial invasion of Iraq, followed by two consecutive combat deployments to Fallujah. Those experiences shaped my understanding of sacrifice, service, and the enduring obligations we owe to those who wear the uniform.

Later, while serving in the Marine Corps Office of Legislative Affairs, I came to appreciate the profound impact that collaboration with Congress can have on the lives of service members and veterans. That experience inspired me to continue my career in both chambers of Congress—on personal staffs, committees, and in leadership roles—always with a focus on national security and veterans' policy.

The veteran community is my community. Ensuring my fellow veterans receive the care, benefits, and respect they have earned is at the core of my professional ambition. If confirmed, I will bring an understanding of military service, legislative experience, and an unwavering commitment to veterans helping advance the VA mission and leave a lasting, positive mark on the Department.

2. Have you and Secretary Collins discussed the roles and responsibilities you would assume as Assistant Secretary for OCLA if you are confirmed? If so, what specific areas of the job were discussed?

Yes, I have discussed the duties, responsibilities, and expectations for the Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs with Secretary Collins. In those discussions, we focused on the need to improve internal efficiencies within the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs so that more of the Department's time and resources can be directed toward enhancing the quality of care at VA hospitals and ensuring veterans receive the benefits they've earned—promptly and with dignity.

Secretary Collins has made clear his commitment to several key priorities for veterans: expanding access to mental health care and suicide prevention services, eliminating homelessness among veterans, accelerating claims processing—including for toxic exposure cases under the PACT Act—and modernizing VA's infrastructure and electronic health records. Our conversations emphasized the need for the legislative team to be a force multiplier in advancing these priorities by maintaining strong, bipartisan relationships with Congress and responding quickly and thoroughly to congressional oversight.

If confirmed, I would measure success by how effectively OCLA enables timely, substantive engagement with Congress, reduces internal response timelines, and helps advance legislation and oversight efforts that lead to tangible improvements in care, benefits, and outcomes for veterans. Ultimately, our mission is to ensure that veterans experience the full impact of Secretary Collins' vision through coordinated legislative action and accountability.

3. Describe the roles and responsibilities you have had since joining VA as Senior Advisor to Secretary Collins.

During my time as a senior advisor, I worked to understand the processes, procedures, and organizational structure of the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs. This included evaluating internal workflows, the coordination of responses to congressional inquiries, and identifying areas where greater accountability and cross-functional collaboration are needed. These efforts were aimed at strengthening the Office's ability to support the Secretary's priorities while ensuring that Congress received timely, accurate, and substantive information in support of its oversight and legislative responsibilities. If confirmed, I will take these assessments and adjust the organizational structure of OCLA to enhance its responsiveness, improve efficiencies, and overall effectiveness.

4. What do you see as the biggest challenges facing OCLA at this time? What steps would you take to immediately begin addressing these issues if confirmed?

One of the biggest challenges currently facing the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs is the lack of clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and standardized workflow processes. This ambiguity often leads to inconsistent coordination, delayed responses, and a lack of clarity regarding ownership of tasks. Additionally, the Office does not currently utilize modern technology tools or a centralized dashboard to track congressional requests for information. As a result, workflows tend to be stovepiped, with limited situational awareness across teams and minimal crosstalk between lines of effort. This creates inefficiencies, missed opportunities for alignment, and an overall lack of accountability in meeting congressional expectations.

If confirmed, I would prioritize establishing clear roles and procedures, implementing a real-time tracking system for congressional interactions, and fostering a culture of communication and shared responsibility to ensure the Office operates as a cohesive, responsive, and mission-driven unit in service to Congress and our nation's veterans.

5. What was your impression of Executive agency legislative affairs offices while you were employed as a Congressional staffer? How has that informed how you would manage OCLA?

During my time as a congressional staffer, my impression of many executive agency legislative affairs offices — including, at times, within the Department of Veterans Affairs — was that they were frequently slow to respond, and in some cases failed to respond at all. When responses were provided, they were often lacking in substance, making it difficult for congressional offices to conduct effective oversight or support constituents in a timely manner. This lack of responsiveness and depth created frustration and eroded trust in the agencies' ability to engage as true partners.

As a result of that experience, if confirmed, I would manage the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs with a clear emphasis on responsiveness, substance, and collaboration. I would organize the office in a way that ensures clear lines of responsibility, integrates internal coordination across VA program offices, and empowers staff to provide timely and complete responses. My goal would be to build a culture that understands Congress not as an external obligation, but as a critical stakeholder and partner in fulfilling VA's mission to serve veterans and their families.

6. What do you understand the function of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs to be and how do you believe OCLA should relate, respond, and interact with Committee staff?

The House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs serve as the primary authorizing bodies responsible for overseeing the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and shaping legislation that impacts veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors. Their functions include conducting oversight

hearings, drafting and advancing legislation related to VA health care, benefits, and services, and ensuring that the Department is fulfilling its mission to serve those who have borne the battle.

The VA Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs (OCLA) plays a critical role in facilitating the relationship between the Department and these committees. OCLA is responsible for ensuring that the Committees receive timely, accurate, and comprehensive information to support their oversight and legislative functions. This includes coordinating hearing preparation, providing technical assistance on legislation, responding to requests for information, and maintaining regular lines of communication with both majority and minority staff.

If confirmed, I would ensure that OCLA engages with the Committees as a proactive, responsive, and trusted partner. The Office must not only respond to inquiries but also anticipate the Committees' needs, elevate their concerns to VA leadership, and ensure the Department remains accountable and aligned with congressional intent. A strong, collaborative relationship with the Committees is essential to advancing the shared goal of improving outcomes for veterans and strengthening the services they depend on.

7. How do you view the relationship between OCLA, Committee members and staff, and subject matter experts within VA?

I view the relationship between the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs (OCLA), VA committee members and staff, and subject matter experts within the VA as a collaborative and interdependent partnership. OCLA should serve as the central coordinating body that ensures Congress receives information that is responsive, timely, and accurate, while also ensuring that the perspectives and priorities of Congress are effectively communicated back to VA leadership.

To do this well, OCLA must be responsive to congressional inquiries, timely in delivering information, and cooperative in facilitating access to the right subject matter experts across the Department. OCLA should not act as a gatekeeper but as a facilitator — connecting committee staff with VA experts, preparing leadership for meaningful engagement, and ensuring that communication flows efficiently in both directions. If confirmed, I would prioritize strengthening these relationships to ensure Congress has the information it needs to conduct effective oversight and improve outcomes for veterans.

8. What time-specific goals do you have for accurate and relevant responses to Congress from members and staff and how would you work within VA to ensure these goals are met? Specify your timeline goals for:

a. Requests For Information responses

Target response within **10 business days**, depending on the complexity. Timeliness is essential to support active legislative drafting, oversight, and constituent inquiries.

b. Letter responses

Aim to respond within **15 - 30 business days**, depending on the scope and complexity. Letters often reflect formal positions or concerns from members of Congress and frequently require coordination across functions and legal counsel.

c. Questions for the Record responses

Goal of **30 calendar days** post-hearing. QFRs are part of the congressional oversight record and require thorough review and sign-off from senior leadership.

d. Briefing request responses

Schedule briefings within **5 business days of the request, and deliver the briefing within 10–15 business days**, when feasible. Prompt briefings allow Congress to stay informed on emerging issues or conduct pre-hearing preparation.

e. Requests for phone calls, white papers, reports or other background materials

- i. **Phone Call Requests:** Facilitate calls within **48–72 hours** to enable real-time communication between congressional offices and VA leadership, particularly for time-sensitive matters.
- ii. **White Papers and Background Materials:** Target **10–15 business days**, depending on the scope and complexity.
- iii. **Reports to Congress** (statutory or ad hoc): Vary depending on legal deadlines, but OCLA's goal should be to provide drafts for internal clearance at least **30–45 days** in advance of due dates to ensure timely delivery.

9. Describe any changes in policy that have been made or that you plan to make in the future related to Congressional inquiries. What types of responses will be sent to the White House for approval?

If confirmed, I plan to implement several changes in policy to improve how the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs (OCLA) handles future congressional inquiries. The steps below are designed to foster a more responsive, and cooperative relationship with Congress — one that ultimately better serves veterans and their families.

First, I would empower our congressional liaisons to respond directly to simple and routine questions without requiring excessive layers of internal clearance, which too often delays timely responses.

Second, I would streamline OCLA's internal workflows to eliminate redundancies, clarify roles, and improve accountability across the team — ensuring that inquiries are tracked and resolved efficiently.

Third, and critically, I would work closely with the various VA lines of business — including health care, benefits, and memorial affairs — to ensure they are partners in delivering quicker, more substantive responses that fully address congressional questions. This includes setting clear timelines and expectations across the Department for responding to OCLA-facilitated requests.

10. How would you work within VA to support Congressional oversight trips and ensure Congressional Members and staff have access to VA employees and officials in their states and districts, regional leadership, and senior leaders and program offices in VA Central Office?

If confirmed, I would make it a priority to ensure that congressional oversight trips are fully supported, and that Members of Congress and their staff have appropriate and meaningful access to VA personnel at all levels. That includes local VA employees and officials in their states and districts, regional leadership, and senior leaders and program offices within VA Central Office. Oversight is not only a constitutional responsibility—it's also an opportunity to strengthen trust, accountability, and mutual understanding between Congress and the Department.

To support this, I would work to standardize and streamline the planning and coordination process for oversight visits, ensuring early communication with field facilities, advance coordination with

congressional offices, and clear guidance for VA staff on how to facilitate visits in a respectful, informative, and responsive manner. I would also ensure OCLA assigns dedicated staff to coordinate each trip and provide follow-up support, helping Members and staff get the information they need — before, during, and after the visit. Open and direct access builds trust, and I would work to make that the norm, not the exception.

11. What would you do to ensure that members of Congress are advised in advance of problems, issues and emerging matters – particularly when those matters are specific to the area a member represents?

If confirmed, I would prioritize proactive communication with Members of Congress, particularly when issues arise that impact veterans in the districts or states they represent. Whenever possible, Members should not learn about problems or emerging matters from the media or after the fact — they should be advised early and directly by the Department. To that end, I would work to establish a standard protocol within the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs (OCLA) to flag and escalate region-specific issues to the appropriate Member's office as soon as possible.

This would include working with the VA's lines of business and regional leadership to develop early warning mechanisms for incidents, service disruptions, or policy changes that may impact specific constituencies. I would also empower OCLA liaisons to coordinate directly with congressional staff to provide timely briefings, background information, and access to relevant officials, ensuring Members are kept informed and have the opportunity to engage constructively. Trust is essential to our relationship with Congress, and I would make proactive notification a central feature of OCLA's operations.

12. Will you advocate across VA's Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs and the Office of the Secretary to ensure the Senate and House Committees on Veterans Affairs are given advance notice of rollouts of announcements or changes in policy? What would be your goal for how many days of advance notice OCLA gives Committee staff prior to these announcements?

Yes, if confirmed, I will absolutely advocate across the Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs and the Office of the Secretary to ensure that the Senate and House Committees on Veterans' Affairs are given advance notice of major rollouts, announcements, or policy changes. It is essential that Congress, particularly the committees of jurisdiction, are not only informed but also appropriately briefed ahead of public-facing developments that impact the veterans they represent.

My goal would be for the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs (OCLA) to provide at least 3 to 5 business days of advance notice to committee staff, whenever feasible. This window would allow for timely briefings, the opportunity to raise questions or concerns, and alignment between the Department and Congress on major initiatives. Ensuring this level of engagement and coordination strengthens trust and reinforces our shared mission to serve veterans effectively and responsibly.

13. How would you identify and evaluate any trends in the concerns raised by members of Congress and how would you present the issues raised to VA senior leaders so they might be addressed?

If confirmed, I would prioritize building a systematic process to identify and evaluate trends in the concerns raised by Members of Congress. To do this, we are developing cross-business processes and an internal dashboard that will track congressional inquiries, categorize them by issue area, geography, and frequency, and help determine whether a concern is isolated, regional, or indicative of a systemic issue across the Department.

This data-driven approach will allow the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs (OCLA) to work closely with the relevant VA administrations and program offices to ensure that concerns are addressed at the appropriate level. When issues are identified, we will respond accordingly — whether that means initiating a local fix, conducting a regional review, or escalating systemic matters to senior VA leadership for action.

Importantly, we will also ensure that Members of Congress are notified proactively when trends tied to their districts or states are identified and addressed. This approach will enhance accountability across the Department and strengthen our collaboration with Congress to better serve veterans and their families.

14. How would you work within VA, across administrations and program teams, for requests from Congress that are considered late or unanswered? Is there any situation in which you would refuse to respond to a request from Congress?

When working with the Office of General Counsel (OGC), and other government teams across administrations, I believe it is essential to ensure that all requests from Congress are addressed in a timely, respectful, and complete manner. For requests that are considered late or unanswered, I would work closely with internal stakeholders to identify the root cause of the delay—whether related to clearance processes, data gathering, or policy sensitivity—and implement corrective action to advance the response.

Equally important is the need for honest, open lines of communication. If a delay is unavoidable, I would ensure that Congress is kept informed through intermittent check-ins and clear communication from OCLA, advising staff of the status, reasons for the delay, and anticipated timelines for resolution. Maintaining trust through proactive updates is as important as delivering the final response itself.

As a general principle, I believe the Department should respond to all congressional inquiries, in recognition of Congress's constitutional oversight role. The only exceptions would be in rare and clearly defined circumstances, such as when the request involves classified information, privacy-protected data, or matters under active litigation. Even in those instances, I would coordinate with OGC to explore whether a partial, redacted, or alternative response could be provided to maintain communication and demonstrate good faith engagement.

If confirmed, I will ensure that OCLA fosters a culture of responsiveness, accountability, and open communication with Congress at every stage of the inquiry process.

15. If confirmed, would you be able to work collegially and impartially with Republicans, Democrats and Independent members and staff?

Yes. If confirmed, I would work collegially and impartially with Republicans, Democrats, and Independent Members of Congress and their staff. Supporting veterans has long been a bipartisan issue, and I believe that OCLA must reflect that spirit of unity by engaging professionally and respectfully with all Members, regardless of political affiliation.

The Secretary has made very public his priority that all resources should be focused on improving the quality of care and benefits for veterans — a mission that enjoys broad bipartisan agreement in Congress. I am fully committed to that goal. My approach would be grounded in collaboration, trust, and responsiveness, with a focus on delivering results that serve the best interests of veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors.

16. How would you manage call or meeting requests from members to speak with the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, and senior VA leaders? What would be your goal for how quickly these senior leaders would be available for a call or meeting?

If confirmed, I would manage call and meeting requests from Members of Congress to speak with the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, and senior VA leaders with a strong sense of urgency and respect for the importance of congressional engagement. The Secretary has made clear his commitment to working closely with Congress, and OCLA would honor that commitment by prioritizing and facilitating these requests as quickly as practicable.

OCLA would coordinate with the appropriate VA offices to ensure schedules are aligned and necessary background materials are prepared in advance, so that the calls or meetings are productive and responsive to the Member's concerns. My goal would be to schedule calls within 48 to 72 hours whenever possible, especially in cases involving time-sensitive or district/state-specific matters. For in-person meetings or more complex engagements, we would work to confirm availability and provide interim updates to the requesting offices to maintain transparency and trust throughout the process.

17. Will you advocate for the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, and other senior VA leaders to testify in Congress upon formal invitation?

Yes. If confirmed, I will advocate for the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, and other senior VA leaders to testify in Congress upon formal invitation, provided there is bipartisan agreement within the committee and support from the Chairman. Testifying is a key mechanism for transparency and accountability, and I fully support senior leadership engaging directly with Congress to address oversight matters and advance policies that improve outcomes for veterans. Ensuring broad, bipartisan support for such engagements reinforces the nonpartisan nature of our mission and helps maintain a productive, respectful relationship between the Department and Congress.

Senator Richard Blumenthal, Ranking Member
Questions for the Record
Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee
Nomination Hearing of Cheryl Mason for Inspector General and
Don Bergin for Assistant Secretary of Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs
June 4, 2025

For Don Bergin:

1. During your nomination hearing, in response to Senator King, you indicated the Department was challenged in providing the Committee with a list of cancelled contracts due to certain constraints. Please detail these constraints, and VA's plan to manage these constraints and provide this information to Congress.

Response:

There are three main challenges in compiling a list of canceled contracts:

1. **Decentralized Contracting Authority:** The VA's procurement system is spread across multiple administrations and staff offices, leading to a lack of uniformly stored data. This decentralization requires pulling data from various systems that do not always communicate with each other.
2. **Legacy IT and Data Systems:** The VA relies on aging procurement and financial management platforms, which hinder efficient contract tracking, especially for older or closed agreements requiring manual retrieval.
3. **Legal and Administrative Complexity:** Contract cancellations involve detailed documentation and formal procedures. Close-outs can be delayed due to audits, litigation, or contractor claims, complicating the determination of when a contract is officially canceled.

VA's Plan to Manage These Constraints:

1. **Centralized Oversight and Reporting:** The Office of Acquisition, Logistics, and Construction (OALC) is working to standardize contract tracking and create a central repository for canceled contracts.
2. **Modernizing Procurement Systems:** Investing in iFAMS and eCMS modernization will improve transparency and real-time contract visibility, enhancing reporting capabilities.
3. **Cross-Administration Coordination:** We are enhancing coordination through policy updates and data-sharing protocols, including periodic reporting requirements from the field.
4. **Enhanced Congressional Transparency:** We are committed to providing regular updates and developing customized reporting tools to meet congressional oversight needs.

PART I: ALL OF THE INFORMATION IN THIS PART WILL BE MADE PUBLIC**1. Basic Biographical Information**

Please provide the following information.

<i>Position to Which You Have Been Nominated</i>	
<u>Name of Position</u>	<u>Date of Nomination</u>
VA Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs	4/2/2025

<i>Current Legal Name</i>			
<u>First Name</u>	<u>Middle Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Suffix</u>
Donald	J	Bergin	II

<i>Addresses</i>					
<u>Residential Address</u> (do not include street address)			<u>Office Address</u> (include street address)		
			Street: 810 Vermont Ave NW		
City: Vienna	State: VA	Zip: 22182	City: Washington	State: DC	Zip: 20420

<i>Other Names Used</i>						
<u>First Name</u>	<u>Middle Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Suffix</u>	<u>Check if Maiden Name</u>	<u>Name Used From</u> (Month/Year) (Check box if estimate)	<u>Name Used To</u> (Month/Year) (Check box if estimate)
					Est ☐	Est ☐
					Est ☐	Est ☐

<i>Birth Year and Place</i>	
Year of Birth (Do not include month and day)	Place of Birth
1977	Washington DC

<i>Marital Status</i>					
Check All That Describe Your Current Situation:					
Never Married	Married	Separated	Annulled	Divorced	Widowed
☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐

<i>Spouse's Name (current spouse only)</i>			
<u>Spouse's First Name</u>	<u>Spouse's Middle Name</u>	<u>Spouse's Last Name</u>	<u>Spouse's Suffix</u>
Grace	Fennell	Bergin	

<i>Spouse's Other Names Used (current spouse only)</i>						
<u>First Name</u>	<u>Middle Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Suffix</u>	<u>Check if Maiden Name</u>	<u>Name Used From</u> (Month/Year) (Check box if estimate)	<u>Name Used To</u> (Month/Year) (Check box if estimate)
Grace	Morgan	Fennell		X	08/1989 ☐ Est	10/2018 ☐ Est
					☐ Est	☐ Est

<i>Children's Names (if over 18)</i>			
First Name	Middle Name	Last Name	Suffix
Donald	John	Bergin	III
Patrick	Christopher	Bergin	

2. Education

List all post-secondary schools attended.

<u>Name of School</u>	<u>Type of School</u> (vocational/technical/trade school, college/university/military college/correspondence/distance/extension/online school)	<u>Date Began School</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate)	<u>Date Ended School</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate) (check "present" box if still in school)	<u>Degree</u>	<u>Date Awarded</u>
UNC Chapel Hill	University	08/1996 ☐ Est	09/2000 ☐ Est ☐ Present	BA	08/2000
Catholic University Columbus School of Law	University	08/2006 ☐ Est	10/2009 ☐ Est ☐ Present	JD	10/2009
Widener Law School	University	08/2005 ☐ Est	07/2006 ☐ Est ☐ Present	NA	
		☐ Est	☐ Est ☐ Present		

3. Employment

(A) List all of your employment activities, including unemployment and self-employment. If the employment activity was military duty, list separate employment activity periods to show each change of military duty station. Do not list employment before your 18th birthday unless to provide a minimum of two years of employment history.

<u>Type of Employment</u> (Active Military Duty Station, National Guard/Reserve, USPHS Commissioned Corps, Other federal employment, State Government (Non- federal Employment), Self- employment, Unemployment, Federal Contractor, Non- Government Employment (excluding self-employment), Other	<u>Name of Your Employer/ Assigned Duty Station</u>	<u>Most Recent Position Title/Rank</u>	<u>Location</u> (City and State only)	<u>Date Employment Began</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate)	<u>Date Employment Ended</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate) (check "present" box if still employed)
Federal Government	Department of Veterans Affairs	Senior Advisor to the Secretary	Washingt on DC	04/2025 Est ☐	Est Present ☐ X
Non-federal Employment	BAE Systems USA	Director of Legislative Affairs	Falls Church VA	02/2020 Est ☐	4/2025 Est ☐
US Senate	Senator John Cornyn	National Security Counsel	Washingt on DC	02/2017 Est ☐	02/2020 Est ☐
US Senate	Homeland Security and Government Affairs Cmte	National Security Counsel	Washingt on DC	11/2015 Est ☐	02/2017 Est ☐
Non-Government Employment	North Highland Company	Senior consultant	Charlotte NC	03/2014 Est ☐	11/2015 Est ☐
Self-Employment	DoBerg Consulting	Owner	Alexandr ia VA	07/2013 Est ☐	03/2014 Est Pres ☐ ☐
US House of Representatives	Rep Mike Turner	National Security Counsel/MLA	Washingt on DC	12/2010 Est ☐	07/2013 Est ☐
Punaro Group	Arnold Punaro	Consultant	McLean VA	01/2010 Est X	12/2010 Est ☐
Federal Government	USMCR	Congressional Liaison	Washingt on DC	04/2007 Est ☐	01/2010 Est ☐
Federal Government	USMC	Infantry Officer	Quantic/ Twentyni ne Palms CA	01/2002 Est ☐	09/2005 Est ☐
Non-federal Employment	Commercial Real Estate	Analyst	Atlanta GA	06/2001 Est X	12/2001 Est X

Non-federal Employment	Mangy Moose	Waiter	Jackson Hole WY	09/2000	Est X	05/2001	Est X
					Est ☐		Est ☐

(B) List any advisory, consultative, honorary or other part-time service or positions with federal, state, or local governments, not listed elsewhere.

<u>Name of Government Entity</u>	<u>Name of Position</u>	<u>Date Service Began</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate)	<u>Date Service Ended</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate) (check "present" box if still serving)
		Est ☐	Est Present ☐ ☐
		Est ☐	Est Present ☐ ☐
		Est ☐	Est Present ☐ ☐

4. Honors and Awards

List all scholarships, fellowships, honorary degrees, civilian service citations, military medals, academic or professional honors, honorary society memberships and any other special recognition for outstanding service or achievement.

- Presidential Unit Citation
- Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal with Combat Valor
- Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal
- Global War on Terrorism Service Medal
- Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal
- National Defense Service Medal

5. Memberships

List all memberships held in professional, social, business, fraternal, scholarly, civic, charitable, or other organizations in the last ten years.

Unless relevant to your nomination, you do NOT need to include memberships in charitable organizations available to the public as a result of a tax-deductible donation of \$1,000 or less, Parent-Teacher Associations, or other organizations connected to schools attended by your children, athletic clubs or teams, automobile support organizations (such

as AAA), discounts clubs (such as Groupon or Sam's Club), or affinity memberships/consumer clubs (such as frequent flyer memberships).

<u>Name of Organization</u>	<u>Dates of Your Membership</u> (You may approximate)	<u>Position(s) Held</u>
Virginia Bar Association	06/2010 - Present	Associate

6. Political Activity

(A) Have you ever been a candidate for or been elected or appointed to a political office?

<u>Name of Office</u>	<u>Elected/Appointed/ Candidate Only</u>	<u>Year(s) Election Held or Appointment Made</u>	<u>Term of Service (if applicable)</u>

(B) List any offices held in or services rendered to a political party or election committee during the last ten years that you have not listed elsewhere.

<u>Name of Party/Election Committee</u>	<u>Office/Services Rendered</u>	<u>Responsibilities</u>	<u>Dates of Service</u>
Portman For Senate Committee	Policy Advisor/Volunteer	National Security and Foreign Affairs	2016

(C) Itemize all individual political contributions of \$200 or more that you have made in the past five years to any individual, campaign organization, political party, political action committee, or similar entity. Please list each individual contribution and not the total amount contributed to the person or entity during the year.

<u>Name of Recipient</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Year of Contribution</u>
Representative Tom Cole	\$1,500	2024
Senator Jim Inhofe	\$500	2022

7. Publications

List the titles, publishers and dates of books, articles, reports or other published materials that you have written, including articles or blog posts published on the Internet.

<u>Title</u>	<u>Publisher</u>	<u>Date(s) of Publication</u>

8. Public Statements

(A) List any testimony, official statements or other communications, including those made on the Internet including on social media or other digital content sites, relating to matters of public policy that you have issued or provided or that others presented on your behalf to public bodies or officials. NA

(B) List any speeches or talks delivered by you, including commencement speeches, remarks, lectures, panel discussions, conferences, political speeches, and question-and-answer sessions. Include the dates and places where such speeches or talks were given. NA

(C) List all interviews you have given to newspapers, magazines or other publications, and radio or television stations (including the dates of such interviews). NA

9. Agreements or Arrangements

X See OGE Form 278. (If, for your nomination, you have completed an OGE Form 278 Executive Branch Personnel Public Financial Disclosure Report, you may check the box here to complete this section and then proceed to the next section.)

As of the date of filing your OGE Form 278, report your agreements or arrangements for: (1) continuing participation in an employee benefit plan (e.g. pension, 401k, deferred compensation); (2) continuation of payment by a former employer (including severance payments); (3) leaves of absence; and (4) future employment.

Provide information regarding any agreements or arrangements you have concerning (1) future employment; (2) a leave of absence during your period of Government service; (3) continuation of payments by a former employer other than the United States Government; and (4) continuing participation in an employee welfare or benefit plan maintained by a former employer other than United States Government retirement benefits.

<u>Status and Terms of Any Agreement or Arrangement</u>	<u>Parties</u>	<u>Date</u> (month/year)

10. Lobbying

Have you ever registered as a lobbyist? If so, please indicate the state, federal, or local bodies with which you have registered (e.g., House, Senate, California Secretary of State).
Yes. Federal – House and Senate.

11. Testifying Before the Congress

(A) Do you agree to appear and testify before any duly constituted committee of the Congress upon the request of such Committee? Yes

(B) Do you agree to provide such information as is requested by such a committee in a timely and accurate manner? Yes

Submissions for the Record

Public Law 110-409
110th Congress

An Act

Oct. 14, 2008
[H.R. 928]

To amend the Inspector General Act of 1978 to enhance the independence of the Inspectors General, to create a Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

Inspector
General Reform
Act of 2008.
5 USC app. 1
note.

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Inspector General Reform Act of 2008”.

SEC. 2. APPOINTMENT AND QUALIFICATIONS OF INSPECTORS GENERAL.

Section 8G(c) of the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.) is amended by adding at the end “Each Inspector General shall be appointed without regard to political affiliation and solely on the basis of integrity and demonstrated ability in accounting, auditing, financial analysis, law, management analysis, public administration, or investigations.”.

SEC. 3. REMOVAL OF INSPECTORS GENERAL.

President.
Deadline.

(a) **ESTABLISHMENTS.**—Section 3(b) of the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.) is amended by striking the second sentence and inserting “If an Inspector General is removed from office or is transferred to another position or location within an establishment, the President shall communicate in writing the reasons for any such removal or transfer to both Houses of Congress, not later than 30 days before the removal or transfer. Nothing in this subsection shall prohibit a personnel action otherwise authorized by law, other than transfer or removal.”.

Deadline.

(b) **DESIGNATED FEDERAL ENTITIES.**—Section 8G(e) of the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.) is amended by striking “shall promptly communicate in writing the reasons for any such removal or transfer to both Houses of the Congress.” and inserting “shall communicate in writing the reasons for any such removal or transfer to both Houses of Congress, not later than 30 days before the removal or transfer. Nothing in this subsection shall prohibit a personnel action otherwise authorized by law, other than transfer or removal.”.

SEC. 4. PAY OF INSPECTORS GENERAL.

(a) **INSPECTORS GENERAL AT LEVEL III OF EXECUTIVE SCHEDULE.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—Section 3 of the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.), is amended by adding at the end the following:

6/5/25, 3:10 PM

VA forces staff in workforce reduction discussions to sign non-disclosure agreements - Government Executive

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Senior Executive Service and General Schedule-14 and 15 employees serving in those roles at the VA have signed NDAs, according to five employees briefed on the situation. CHIP SOMODEVILLA / GETTY IMAGES

[Workforce](#)

VA forces staff in workforce reduction discussions to sign non-disclosure agreements

Senior leaders are contemplating which jobs to keep and which to slash in meetings, but telling staff they cannot discuss those topics.

ERIC KATZ | APRIL 24, 2025

[VETERANS](#) [RIFS](#) [GOVERNMENT REORGANIZATION](#)


The Veterans Affairs Department is requiring all employees working on its plans to slash tens of thousands of workers from its rolls to sign non-disclosure agreements, an unusual move that has prevented supervisors from sharing basic information with staff.

VA has begun holding meetings with representatives from across the department to discuss its workforce reduction plans after standing up a Reorganization Implementation Cell. Senior Executive Service and General Schedule-14 and 15 employees serving in those roles have signed NDAs, according to five employees briefed on the situation. *Government Executive* [first reported](#) that VA plans to cut its workforce down to fiscal 2019 levels, leading to cuts of around 80,000 employees.

Senior leaders throughout VA appear to be taking their NDAs seriously. In a recent meeting, a recording of which was obtained by *Government Executive*, Colleen Richardson, executive director of VA's Caregiver Support Program, told employees she had answers to their questions but could not disclose them.

6/5/25, 3:10 PM

VA forces staff in workforce reduction discussions to sign non-disclosure agreements - Government Executive

Richardson said, for example, she could not disclose how many employees had signed up for the department's "deferred resignation program" that has enabled some staff to remain on paid leave until they separate from the agency by Sept. 30. Employees were eager to know the information as more people signing up will result in fewer employees being laid off.

"I want to just let people know a majority of senior leaders have been asked to sign non-disclosure agreements, NDAs," Richardson said. "I have been asked to sign an NDA so we are very, very limited on what information we can also share."

NDAs for issues such as personnel matters are highly unusual in government, where such agreements are typically limited to procurement-sensitive discussions and national security settings that include classified information. One senior human resources official in another part of government called the agreements "strange, technically unnecessary and redundant."

Federal employees already agree to not disclose deliberative matters to the public as part of their jobs and therefore the substance of the NDA is already implied and expected, that person said. The official speculated VA was seeking to limit what employees can say about those discussions in the event that they are themselves part of a reduction in force, as the NDA would likely extend beyond their termination.

VA did not respond to a request for comment.

Rep. Mark Takano, D-Calif., the top Democrat on the House Veterans Affairs Committee, said the NDAs could illegally circumvent whistleblower protection laws and encouraged employees to come forward to help lawmakers shed a light on the process.

"The use of NDAs in this context looks like a deliberate effort by the Trump administration to silence VA employees and block oversight," Takano said. "Secretary [Doug] Collins has failed to answer basic questions from Congress, and now his department is doubling down on secrecy."

Members of both parties have expressed apprehension about VA's large-scale workforce reduction plans.

One VA employee who has discussed the NDA-subjected meetings with attendees said the senior leaders "don't like" having to sign the agreements but "are being cautious not to create chaos."

"These are all really good, talented and caring leadership being thrown in the middle of this scuffle and are doing their best to protect us and our programs," the employee said. "I feel for them and know they are bruised and tired."

Another VA employee said a senior executive told 200 staff in a town hall that they were restricted by the NDA. The leadership team of that office has "been as open with us" as they can, but have offered up few details of the workforce reduction discussions. A third VA staffer briefed on the meetings found some comfort in, unlike some other agencies, the department involving career staff in the workforce meetings.

VA will review the suggestions from individual components in May and release its reorganization plan in June. RIFs will take place by September.

The discussions to date have focused on which positions VA will shed, according to one official familiar with them, though they have not yet begun contemplating which actual individuals will lose their jobs. The meetings have also involved the impacts of the hiring freeze and requests for [additional exemptions](#). The leadership teams are reacting constantly to updates from the top levels of the department as "the rules of the game seem to be changing by the day," the official said.

Another VA employee said the meetings have also honed in on reductions to the department's call centers. VA currently has [many call centers](#), including one at each of its regional offices for scheduling appointments. The most recent plan, the employee said, is to cut that down to two call centers: one for scheduling appointments and another for matters such as billing, pharmacy and community care. VA's 988 crisis line would also remain separate.

Richardson, the Caregiver Support Program executive, told employees she had to withhold details from them.

"There are certain things I cannot discuss even if I know them," she said. "My sincere apologies, but that's the truth behind it." 

How are these changes affecting you? Share your experience with us:
Eric Katz: ekatz@govexec.com, Signal: [erickatz.78](#)

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<https://www.govexec.com/workforce/2025/04/va-forces-staff-workforce-reduction-discussions-sign-non-disclosure-agreements/404806/>

2/3

8 Inspectors General Fired by Trump File Lawsuit Seeking Reinstatement

The case is the latest to challenge a wave of actions by President Trump that brazenly violated legal limits on his power.



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By Charlie Savage

Charlie Savage writes about presidential power and legal policy. He reported from Washington.

Feb. 12, 2025

Eight former inspectors general who were summarily fired by President Donald J. Trump last month filed a lawsuit on Wednesday asking a judge to declare their removals illegal and order the government to reinstate them.

“The purported firings violated unambiguous federal statutes — each enacted by bipartisan majorities in Congress and signed into law by the president — to protect inspectors general from precisely this sort of interference with the discharge of their critical, nonpartisan duties,” the complaint said.

The lawsuit asserts that the plaintiffs remain the lawful inspectors general of their agencies because Mr. Trump’s dismissals broke the law. It asks for an injunction requiring the executive branch to allow them to return to work and awarding them back pay.

Four days after Mr. Trump returned to office last month, the White House notified as many as 17 inspectors general in tersely worded emails that they were being terminated because of “changing priorities.”

Those were all in direct conflict with statutory restrictions on firing such officials in the Inspector General Act of 1978 and strengthened by lawmakers in the bipartisan Securing Inspectors General Act of 2022.

That statute says that before an inspector general is removed, the president must provide Congress with 30 days' advance notice, including a written explanation with "the substantive rationale, including detailed and case-specific reasons for any such removal."

The plaintiffs were Robert P. Storch, who was dismissed as the inspector general of the Defense Department; Michael J. Missal of Veterans Affairs; Christi A. Grimm of Health and Human Services; Cardell K. Richardson Sr. of State; Sandra D. Bruce of Education; Phyllis K. Fong of Agriculture; Larry D. Turner of Labor; and Hannibal Ware, known as Mike, of the Small Business Administration.

"The firing of the independent, nonpartisan inspectors general was a clear violation of the law," Mr. Missal, who helped organize the lawsuit, said in an interview. "The I.G.s are bringing this action for reinstatement so that they can go back to work fighting fraud waste and abuse on behalf of the American people."

On Tuesday, Mr. Trump also fired another inspector general, Paul K. Martin of U.S.A.I.D., the day after he published a report on the impact of the president's broad-brush freeze on foreign aid spending and the firing or placing on administrative leave of much of the agency's staff and contractors.

Mr. Martin's report found that \$489 million of food assistance from American farmers that was already at ports, in transit and in warehouses had been put at risk of spoilage and required unanticipated storage costs. He also warned that a program intended to make sure that humanitarian assistance in chaotic regions did not get diverted to terrorists had stopped functioning.

Mr. Martin was fired via a terse email from the White House, Mr. Missal said. Like the earlier round of firings, Mr. Martin's ouster was not preceded by a written notice to Congress with a detailed rationale 30 days ahead of time.

6/5/25, 3:05 PM

8 Inspectors General Fired by Trump File Lawsuit Seeking Reinstatement - The New York Times

The lawsuit said that “despite the obvious illegality of these purported firings,” the agencies had cut off access to the plaintiffs’ government email accounts and computer systems, government-issued phones, work computers and identity cards that allowed them to enter their offices.

“These actions have had their intended effect of making it impossible for the I.G.s to perform their lawful duties,” the complaint said. “Because the purported removals were illegal and hence a nullity, the actions just described constituted illegal interference with the I.G.s’ official duties.”

The inspectors general are being represented by a group of lawyers at a major firm, Wilmer Hale. Their complaint was signed by Seth P. Waxman, who was the solicitor general in the Clinton administration.

Charlie Savage writes about national security and legal policy.

A version of this article appears in print on , Section A, Page 21 of the New York edition with the headline: 8 Inspectors General Fired by Trump Sue for Reinstatement

Fired Inspectors General Raise Alarms as Trump Administration Moves to Finalize Purge

The full scope of the Friday night mass firings was coming into sharper view as one fired watchdog official warned of “a never-ending cycle of politicization.”



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By Charlie Savage

Charlie Savage writes about legal policy, including presidential power.

Jan. 27, 2025

The Trump administration on Monday ordered former staff members for as many as 17 fired inspectors general to immediately arrange for the return of work laptops, phones, parking decals and ID cards — even as questions remained over whether President Trump broke the law in dismissing independent watchdogs.

Some of the fired officials were seeking to raise alarms about what had happened. Among them was Mark Greenblatt, whom Mr. Trump had appointed as the inspector general of the Interior Department five years ago and who had led an interagency council of the watchdog officials until the new year.

“This raises an existential threat with respect to the primary independent oversight function in the federal government,” Mr. Greenblatt said in an interview. “We have preserved the independence of inspectors general by making them not swing with every change in political party.”

He warned that the credibility of the inspectors general would be at issue if Mr. Trump put in “lackeys that are rubber-stamping his programs and exonerating allegations for his own people willy-nilly.” Doing so would give the next Democratic

president incentive to fire them all, too, setting off “a never-ending cycle of politicization.”

Aboard Air Force One on Saturday, Mr. Trump defended the purge. “Some people thought that some were unfair or some were not doing the job,” he said, falsely claiming that a mass removal of inspectors general was “a very standard thing to do.”

That is not true. While it is the case that after Congress enacted the Inspector General Act in 1978 and President Ronald Reagan removed all of those he inherited from President Jimmy Carter in 1981, he later rehired some of them. And since then, the norm has been that they remain in place when new presidents take office, underscoring their role as nonpartisan officials.

Even as word began to seep out late Friday and into the weekend that the White House had tersely dismissed officials, citing its “changing priorities,” it had not released a comprehensive list of who had been fired, leading to confusion about the extent of the purge.

In an interview on Monday, Hannibal Ware, who goes by Mike and who took over as the chairman of the interagency council in January and was among those fired, said the dismissals he knew of extended to 17 officials covering 18 agencies. He had held the watchdog role for two agencies, one of which was in an acting capacity.



Hannibal Ware was among the inspectors general fired. Joe Raedle/Getty Images

The agencies were, he said, the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Education, Energy, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Labor, State, Transportation, Treasury and Veterans Affairs.

They also included, he said, a special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction and the internal watchdogs at the Environmental Protection Agency, the White House's Office of Personnel Management and Mr. Ware's own two agencies, the Small Business Administration and the Social Security Administration.

But, underscoring the confusion, at least one of those inspectors, Krista A. Boyd of the Office of Personnel Management, found herself locked out of the system even though she had not received an email informing her that she was fired, according to people familiar with the matter. The inspector general community is assuming that she is terminated, too.

In response to the purge, Mr. Ware, in a letter to the White House late Friday, suggested that the firings were illegal because they violated a law that requires giving Congress 30 days' advance notice with the reason for any removal of an inspector general.

He said on Monday that even though he was not removed in accordance with the law, he was effectively fired given that he no longer had access to the building and computer systems.

Mr. Greenblatt, for his part, said he had decided against going to the office on Monday, even to retrieve his personal items from his desk, because he did not want to provoke a security incident.

Congress passed the Inspector General Act as part of the wave of post-Watergate reforms to government. The idea was to have officials embedded in major parts of the executive branch who did not report to that department or agency's head, and so were able to perform independent internal oversight.

In 2020, Mr. Trump summarily ousted or sidelined a series of inspectors general who were seen as investigating his administration aggressively. Partly in response to that, Congress strengthened the 30-day-notice law by requiring presidents to provide a "substantive rationale, including detailed and case-specific reasons" for the firing.

In an interview, Mr. Ware warned that if the administration could flout that part of the Inspector General Act, then it would establish that it need not abide by the rest of that law — including provisions requiring giving the watchdogs unfettered access to agency files — either.

"What strength is there in the Inspector General Act if they say they don't have to abide by parts of it?" he asked. "This is a threat to our democracy."

Another person familiar with the matter, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the deliberations, said several of the fired watchdog officials were discussing whether to file a lawsuit over the fact that Mr. Trump had defied the notice law.

It was not yet clear if any would do so.

Some advisers to Mr. Trump have been interested in advancing the so-called unitary executive theory, an expansive view of presidential power. According to the theory, the president must have complete control of the executive branch, so Congress may not give other officials independent decision-making authority or restrict the president's ability to fire them.

Michael J. Missal, who was removed as the inspector general for the Department of Veterans Affairs, pointed to Congress as a potential defense of the institution.

"For inspectors general to continue to improve government services and ensure taxpayer funds are spent effectively, they must continue to be truly independent and have the support of Congress," he said.

Democrats have vehemently denounced the purge, portraying it as clearing the way for corruption to go undiscovered.

In a letter over the weekend, the ranking Democrats on House oversight committees rebuked Mr. Trump.

His "attempt to unlawfully and arbitrarily remove more than a dozen independent, nonpartisan inspectors general without notice to Congress or the public and in the dead of night" was a blatant violation of the law, they said.



Senator Charles E. Grassley and Senator Joni Ernst, both Iowa Republicans, announced a bipartisan caucus to support watchdogs before Mr. Trump was inaugurated. Tom Brenner for The New York Times

But because Democrats do not control Congress, attention has zeroed in on Republican leaders who style themselves as champions of inspectors general — especially Iowa’s two senators, Charles E. Grassley and Joni Ernst. Days before Mr. Trump was inaugurated, the pair announced they were starting a bipartisan caucus to support the watchdogs.

Mr. Grassley and a spokeswoman for Ms. Ernst issued relatively measured statements over the weekend saying they wanted to learn more about Mr. Trump’s decision.

Mr. Grassley noted that “the 30-day detailed notice of removal that the law demands was not provided to Congress,” while Ms. Ernst said she looked forward to working with Mr. Trump on nominations for successors.

Representatives for both did not respond to requests for further comment on Monday.

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May 22, 2025

The Honorable Tammy Hull
Acting Chair
Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency
1750 H Street NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20006

Dear Acting Chair Hull:

I am writing to request information regarding any involvement or recommendations made by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE) as it relates to the nomination of an Inspector General (IG) for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and related matters from November 2024 to the present. A nomination for VA IG was received by the Senate on May 6, 2025, and this letter pertains to the Committee's review of that nomination and related matters. CIGIE's work as a non-partisan, independent organization tasked with improving cross-government IG efforts to reduce waste, fraud, and abuse in federal programs makes your perspective valuable to the Committee.

As you know, beginning in late January of this year, President Trump illegally fired more than a dozen IGs, including Mr. Mike Missal, VA's IG. 5 U.S.C. § 403(b), as amended by the Securing Inspector General Independence Act of 2022, Public Law 17-263, requires the President "communicate in writing the reasons for any such removal or transfer to both Houses of Congress, not later than 30 days before the removal or transfer." Congress did not receive the required communication in advance of the terminations and still has received no such justification as of the date of this letter.

In the Inspector General Reform Act of 2008, Public Law 110-409, Congress established CIGIE and required CIGIE to submit recommendations of individuals to the White House or other appropriate appointing authorities for consideration when filling a vacant IG position.

With that as background, the Committee would like your assistance in providing information on the following topics:

1. Describe the standard processes CIGIE follows to evaluate and make recommendations for potential Inspectors General nominees.
 - a. What criteria does CIGIE use to evaluate possible IG candidates?
 - b. Are there particular qualifications or professional backgrounds that are preferred?
 - c. Are there particular criteria or backgrounds that would disqualify candidates?
2. Describe the processes CIGIE has followed related to VA's IG position since November 6, 2024, and how that has differed from the standard processes followed in previous administrations.
 - a. Have there been any communications with the Trump Administration related to the firing of former VA Inspector General Mike Missal?
 - b. Have there been any communications with the Trump Administration related to the nomination of Cheryl Mason to be VA Inspector General?

3. Since November 6, 2024, has CIGIE provided or been asked to provide names for consideration by the Administration as suitable candidates for VA IG?
4. Please provide any other relevant information CIGIE wishes to share on these topics.

In order for the Committee to review your responses in advance of a nomination hearing which may occur in the near future, please respond to this letter no later than May 30, 2025. Thank you for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,


Richard Blumenthal
Ranking Member



**COUNCIL OF THE INSPECTORS GENERAL
ON INTEGRITY AND EFFICIENCY**

June 2, 2025

The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
Ranking Member, Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Ranking Member Blumenthal,

We write in response to your letter of May 22, 2025, requesting information regarding the statutory role of the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE) in making recommendations for potential Inspector General (IG) nominations or appointments.

1. Describe the standard processes CIGIE follows to evaluate and make recommendations for potential Inspectors General nominees.

The Inspector General Act of 1978 (IG Act) requires CIGIE to “submit recommendations of individuals to the appropriate appointing authority for any appointment to an office of Inspector General.”¹ The appropriate appointing authority is the White House (for President appointed Senate confirmed (PAS) IGs) or the relevant agency head (for designated federal entity (DFE) IGs).

In accordance with this statutory mandate, CIGIE has established the Inspector General Candidate Recommendation Panel (the Panel). The Panel is comprised of at least five CIGIE members consisting of both PAS and DFE IGs who have varied professional experiences and backgrounds. The Panel oversees the process and communicates its recommendations to the appropriate appointing authority.

The Panel’s objective is to provide impartial recommendations and independent input regarding the professional qualifications of IG candidates. The Panel’s performance of its role assists the appointing authority’s evaluation process to help ensure that highly qualified, objective, and impartial individuals serve in the IG role.

The Panel’s standard process is as follows:

- 1) Review candidate applications, including candidate resumes and cover letters, to determine whether the candidate application warrants an interview.
- 2) Conduct interviews with the candidates to determine whether they have the experience and ability to successfully fulfill the duties and responsibilities of a PAS or DFE IG position.

¹ 5 U.S.C. § 424(c)(1)(F). This requirement applies to IGs appointed under 5 U.S.C. § 424(b)(1)(A) or (B), that is, all President appointed, Senate confirmed (PAS) IGs; all agency head appointed or Designated Federal Entity (DFE) IGs; and the Inspectors General of the Intelligence Community and the Central Intelligence Agency.

- 3) Provide a candidate recommendation to the appropriate appointing authority based on the totality of the candidate application and interview.

a. What criteria does CIGIE use to evaluate possible IG candidates?

Panel members evaluate the professional competence, integrity and overall temperament of each candidate based upon the application package and accompanying interview. In conducting its evaluation of each candidate, the Panel focuses strictly on the professional qualifications detailed in the IG Act, as well as the candidate's leadership, and overall temperament.

b. Are there particular qualifications or professional backgrounds that are preferred?

Panel members will examine the candidate's resume to determine whether the candidate meets the statutory requirement of the IG Act that IGs be appointed "without regard to political affiliation and solely on the basis of integrity and demonstrated ability in accounting, auditing, financial analysis, law, management analysis, public administration, or investigations." 5 U.S.C. § 403(a); § 415(c). Generally, this means that the candidate should have experience working in one or more of the enumerated disciplines as a relatively senior official. Experience in the IG community is not mandatory to be considered for an IG position.

c. Are there particular criteria or backgrounds that would disqualify candidates?

As described above, IGs should be appointed "without regard to political affiliation and solely on the basis of integrity and demonstrated ability in" one or more of the statutorily enumerated disciplines. 5 U.S.C. § 403(a); § 415(c). In addition, independence is the bedrock principle of the IG Act. The Panel specifically analyzes candidates' understanding of core IG principles, and any previous activity that would not be considered impartial in fact or appearance and could potentially raise questions with Congress or the public.

2. Describe the processes CIGIE has followed related to VA's IG position since November 6, 2024, and how that has differed from the standard processes followed in previous administrations.

CIGIE was not aware of the Administration's intention to name a nominee for the VA IG position, and thus we did not have an opportunity to review the nominee's professional credentials. CIGIE's primary point of contact with an Administration is the OMB Deputy Director for Management (DDM), and a new DDM was just confirmed recently. The DDM serves as CIGIE's Executive Chairperson and helps facilitate communications between the IG community and the Administration, to include PAS IG candidate information. We have begun meetings with the new DDM and have discussed CIGIE's role in the IG-nominee process, as outlined below.

CIGIE generally follows the process as set forth in response to question 1 above when it receives candidate applications through either of the following channels:

- 1) Through CIGIE: Individuals who want to be considered for a PAS IG position will send a resume and cover letter to the Panel email address at IGCandidatePanel@cigie.gov.

Once a candidate submits an application package, CIGIE will acknowledge receipt of the package. CIGIE will then provide the candidate's submission package to the Panel for review, and the Panel will vote on whether to proceed with an interview.

- 2) Through the Administration: The Panel may also receive candidate applications directly from the Administration or appointing authority in an effort to determine if the candidate's professional qualifications would warrant a nomination for or appointment to an IG position. These candidates will be interviewed by the Panel.

The Panel strictly maintains the confidentiality of discussions and the identity of all interested candidates who submit an application, which is essential to the Panel's ability to conduct interviews and assess a candidate's professional qualifications. Once the Panel provides a recommendation to the Administration or appointing authority, CIGIE's role is complete. The appointing authority is subsequently responsible for executing their respective processes for nominating or appointing the IG.

We expect to work with Mr. Ueland and the Administration on this effort going forward.

- a. *Have there been any communications with the Trump Administration related to the firing of former VA Inspector General Mike Missal?*

CIGIE has not had any communications with the Administration specifically about the removal of IG Missal.

- b. *Have there been any communications with the Trump Administration related to the nomination of Cheryl Mason to be VA Inspector General?*

There have not been any communications between CIGIE and the Administration related to the nomination of Cheryl Mason to be the VA IG.

3. *Since November 6, 2024, has CIGIE provided or been asked to provide names for consideration by the Administration as suitable candidates for VA IG?*

CIGIE has not provided or been asked to provide names of candidates for consideration for the VA IG position.

4. *Please provide any other relevant information CIGIE wishes to share on these topics.*

The Administration or other appointing authority determines the level of engagement and influence that CIGIE performs throughout the IG vacancy recruitment process. As I mentioned, we have communicated CIGIE's role in vetting candidates for IG positions to the new OMB DDM, and we look forward to working with the Administration on this critical effort. We remain prepared to conduct our statutory function and are committed to supporting the appointment of highly qualified IGs in their critical role of promoting economy, efficiency, and effectiveness and detecting and preventing fraud, waste, and mismanagement in government programs and operations. Additional information about filling IG vacancies can be found on [Oversight.gov](https://www.oversight.gov).

Please feel free to contact me with additional questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Tammy L. Hull". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "T" and "H".

Tammy L. Hull
Acting Chair, CIGIE

6/5/25, 3:12 PM

NDAs for VA employees working on staff reduction plans prompts House Dems probe - Government Executive

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VA has in recent weeks held meetings with representatives from across the department to discuss its workforce reduction plans after standing up a Reorganization Implementation Cell. J. DAVID AKE/GETTY IMAGES

[Oversight](#)

NDAs for VA employees working on staff reduction plans prompts House Dems probe

The use of non-disclosure agreements could 'chill employees from disclosing violations of waste, fraud and abuse,' top oversight Democrat says.

ERIC KATZ | MAY 13, 2025

VETERANS RIFS WHISTLEBLOWERS



Updated May 14 at 9:34 a.m.

House Democrats are probing whether the Veterans Affairs Department is unlawfully preventing its employees from engaging with lawmakers or other oversight bodies, asking the agency to provide more information on the "gag orders" it has implemented for part of its workforce.

The letter from House Oversight and Government Reform Ranking Member Gerry Connolly, D-Va., follows *Government Executive's* reporting that VA was requiring employees working on the department's plan to slash its workforce to [sign non-disclosure agreements](#). The unusual move has prevented supervisors from sharing basic information with staff and raised questions about whether VA was skirting whistleblower protection laws.

"To ensure that the Trump Administration is not unlawfully prohibiting or intimidating current or former employees from communicating any such abuses to Congress, we request documents and information related to these reports," Connolly said in a letter to VA Secretary Doug Collins on Tuesday.

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NDAs for VA employees working on staff reduction plans prompts House Dems probe - Government Executive

VA has in recent weeks held meetings with representatives from across the department to discuss its workforce reduction plans after standing up a Reorganization Implementation Cell. Senior Executive Service and General Schedule-14 and 15 employees serving in those roles have signed NDAs that prohibit them from discussing those efforts. *Government Executive* first reported that VA plans to cut its workforce down to fiscal 2019 levels, leading to cuts of around 80,000 employees.

Connolly suggested the NDAs raise questions about efforts to “undercut whistleblower protections.” By law, any NDAs in government must include language that affirmatively states the agreements do not supersede employees’ right to discuss the matters at hand with Congress, inspectors general or the Office of Special Counsel. NDAs within federal agencies are typically limited to procurement-sensitive discussions and national security settings that include classified information and deploying them for personnel matters is rare.

“The imposition of confidentiality agreements could chill employees from disclosing violations of waste, fraud, and abuse to Congress,” Connolly said. “It is imperative that these courageous truth-tellers are able to expose misconduct without fear of retaliation or reprisal.”

The top oversight Democrat asked VA to, by May 26, provide any documents or communications since President Trump took office related to any NDA, confidentiality agreement or other restriction on employees disclosing information. He specifically asked for details on any restrictions employees might face in communicating with Congress, IGs or OSC.

Connolly further asked Collins to “do right by our nation’s veterans and issue an official statement to make clear that you will stand up for federal whistleblower rights and honor this critical accountability measure to the American people.”

After publication of this story, Pete Kasperowicz, a VA spokesman, said the department is using the NDA to prevent leaks to the press.

“VA is using NDAs to stop leaks of pre-decisional and deliberative information that the media and union bosses are exploiting to fearmonger and scare veterans away from the VA system,” Kasperowicz said, adding employees are already prohibited from disclosing confidential information. “VA’s NDAs simply reinforce this legal requirement without preventing employees from communicating with Congress or the inspector general.”

Connolly is the latest lawmaker to raise concerns about VA’s NDAs. In a hearing last week, Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., the top Democrat on the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, asked Collins to “avoid the use of non-disclosure agreements with employees so that we can get more facts from them.”

Rep. Mark Takano, D-Calif., Blumenthal’s House counterpart, has said the NDAs could illegally circumvent whistleblower protection laws and encouraged employees to come forward to help lawmakers shed a light on the process.

“The use of NDAs in this context looks like a deliberate effort by the Trump administration to silence VA employees and block oversight,” Takano said. “Secretary Collins has failed to answer basic questions from Congress, and now his department is doubling down on secrecy.”

This story has been updated with comment from VA.

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President Donald Trump arrives to deliver remarks at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia on May 26, 2025. He has nominated some replacements after firing many oversight officials. [AP](#). LOEB/GETTY IMAGES

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Trump's picks for oversight roles will jeopardize independent scrutiny of government operations, watchdog groups say

The president recently nominated individuals to serve as special counsel and agency inspectors general, both of which receive and investigate complaints of waste, fraud and abuse.

SEAN MICHAEL NEWHOUSE | JUNE 2, 2025

WHISTLEBLOWERS INSPECTORS GENERAL



Several good government groups are flagging that President Donald Trump's nominees to fill watchdog roles are unqualified and lack the independence required of their possible jobs, which they argue could lead to the weakening of government oversight and harm federal employees.

Office of Special Counsel

Trump on May 29 nominated Paul Ingrassia to lead the [Office of Special Counsel](#), which safeguards merit principles in the civil service, protects whistleblowers and enforces the Hatch Act — the law that restricts federal employees' political activity.

Ingrassia has served as the White House liaison to the Homeland Security and Justice departments. Prior to his work in the administration, he was a podcast host who said Nikki Haley, Trump's opponent in the 2024 Republican primaries, [should be deported](#), has legally and publicly [defended Andrew Tate](#), an influencer who has been accused of rape and human trafficking in Europe, and called Hamas' Oct. 7 attack against Israel a "psyop."

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Trump's picks for oversight roles will jeopardize independent scrutiny of government operations, watchdog groups say - Government Executive

David Kligerman, senior vice president and special counsel at the legal nonprofit Whistleblower Aid, emphasized that the OSC is integral to enable whistleblowing.

"When you remove the really sole protection for a vast majority of federal employees, the special counsel, you really fundamentally inhibit the ability of folks to make these protected disclosures," he said. "There is no longer disincentive inside the federal government for a supervisor or some other person to simply push out those, retaliate against those or fire those who have come forward to report waste, fraud and abuse, and as a result, have a profound chilling effect."

Kligerman also warned that a "partisan-minded" special counsel could turn the OSC from a "shield" meant to protect whistleblowers into a "sword" that could be used to go after individuals.

"If a special counsel wanted to shut down whistleblowing, not only could he or she block any efforts by the OSC to protect whistleblowers from retaliation, but he or she could also use the OSC to actively aid and abet that retaliation by sharing information about the names and allegations of whistleblowers to the very individuals at agencies who are involved in the alleged wrongdoing," he wrote in a follow-up message.

Kligerman also noted that special counsels are [required by law](#) to be an "attorney who, by demonstrated ability, background, training or experience, is especially qualified to carry out the functions of the position." Ingrassia graduated from law school in 2022 and became a registered attorney in New York less than a year ago.

"I think that [the Trump administration will] have their work cut out for them to demonstrate that someone with just a few years of experience out of law school can handle this pretty extraordinary task in a bipartisan or nonpartisan manner," Kligerman said.

In a social media post announcing Ingrassia's nomination, Trump described him as a "highly respected attorney, writer, and Constitutional Scholar."

After a legal battle, Trump in March [fired Hampton Dellinger](#), the last confirmed special counsel who was appointed by former President Joe Biden, before the end of his five-year term.

Inspectors general

In his first week in office, [Trump fired nearly 20 inspectors general](#) — officials who investigate waste, fraud and abuse at agencies. The White House characterized them as "rogue, partisan bureaucrats who have weaponized the justice system against their political enemies."

Individuals who Trump has picked so far as replacements include a person who was reportedly forced to resign from a state job due to misuse of funds, someone who is a leader in the department she would audit and a former GOP congressman.

"Some of them are more political. Not all of them seem to have relevant expertise or experience, and some of them do not seem to be independent from the agency they would then oversee," said Faith Williams, a director at the nonpartisan Project on Government Oversight. "So as a whole, not a strong applicant pool."

House Virginia Democrats on March 28 [sent a letter](#) to Trump requesting that he rescind his nomination of T. March Bell to be IG for the Health and Human Services Department. They pointed to [media reports](#) that he was ousted from his deputy position at a state agency in 1997 after an audit showed he improperly authorized nearly \$8,000 to a former colleague and accused him of [lacking transparency](#) regarding his senior advisor role with a \$125,000 annual salary in the administration of Gov. Glenn Youngkin, R-Va.

mission to provide independent oversight and accountability at HHS," they wrote.

Bell also [served at HHS during Trump's first term](#) and in 2015 was the GOP staff director and chief counsel for a House committee that investigated Planned Parenthood.

Cheryl Mason, who is Trump's pick for IG at the Veterans Affairs Department, previously served as chair of the Board of Veterans Appeals and is a [senior advisor to VA Secretary Doug Collins](#).

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., the ranking member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, argued her nomination is a conflict of interest.

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"Veterans deserve an inspector general who will conduct investigations free of interference and collusion from Collins and the Trump administration," [he said in a May statement](#). "Otherwise, we will be putting veterans at even greater risk of corruption and abuse of power."

Trump also has [nominated former Rep. Anthony D'Esposito, R-N.Y.](#), to be IG for the Labor Department. *The New York Times* reported that [he may have violated House ethics rules](#) by hiring his fiancée's daughter as well as a woman with whom he was having an affair.

IGs are [required to be appointed without regard to political affiliation](#) and based on integrity and ability in: accounting, auditing, financial analysis, law, management analysis, public administration, investigations.

Liz Hempowicz — the deputy executive director of American Oversight, a nonpartisan open records nonprofit that has [criticized the IG firings](#) — said some of Trump's nominees "are an insult to every taxpayer who expects transparency and honest oversight."

"When a president nominates ethically compromised loyalists to serve as watchdogs, he's not trying to fight waste, fraud and abuse, he's trying to bury it," she said in a statement to *Government Executive*. "It's not just politicization — it's sabotage, and it should alarm anyone who cares about basic government accountability."

Williams, of POGO, expressed confidence that employees in IG offices would continue to work with integrity despite the circumstances. But she said the firings and nominations prompt scrutiny, particularly about how future investigations will be prioritized.

"What reports are coming out and what reports are not coming out? Do we hear of anything being sort of set aside or put on the back burner that might have a political reason as to why?" she said. "I think those are the kinds of questions we'll need to ask ourselves."

Neither Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, a longtime IG defender, or Sen. Joni Ernst, R-Iowa, the head of the bipartisan IG Caucus, responded to a request for comment. Sen. Gary Peters, D-Mich., the ranking member of the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee who [recently issued a report about the effects of Trump's IG firings](#), also did not respond to a request for comment.

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Protesters hold an upside down American flag, a sign of distress, as U.S. military veterans and their supporters protest against the Trump administration's cuts to the Veterans Affairs Department and other changes affecting veterans and the military outside the Indiana Statehouse in Indianapolis. JEREMY HOGAN/SOPA IMAGES/LIGHTROCKET VIA GETTY IMAGES

[Management](#)

VA blocks its benefits employees from speaking freely to the department's lawyers

Attorneys at VA, who play a key role in helping veterans receive benefits, are the latest in the Trump administration to face potential sidelining.

ERIC KATZ | MARCH 20, 2025

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The Veterans Affairs Department has instructed employees in its benefits office not to interact with VA's cadre of attorneys without direct permission from political leadership, raising questions as to how employees there will seek legal advice.

The Veterans Benefits Administration frequently turns to VA's Office of General Counsel for questions on adjudicating claims, handling litigation and interpreting new laws and directives. Cheryl Mason, a senior advisor to VA Secretary Doug Collins, gave directions that VBA business lines and staff offices "should have NO direct contact with OGC" without first receiving permission from Mason, according to a series of emails recently sent to staff and obtained by *Government Executive*.

"That means no one in VBA should make a call or send an email to anyone in OGC without prior approval," according to one such email.

The policy appears to mark the latest effort by the Trump administration to sideline career attorneys. It has fired or [pushed out lawyers](#) in key roles at the Justice Department. It has also consolidated the general counsel's regional presence within the Health and Human Services Department, going from 10 offices down to four and beginning the layoff process for two-thirds of those staff.

<https://www.govexec.com/management/2025/03/va-blocks-its-benefits-employees-speaking-freely-departments-lawyers/403916/>

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VA blocks its benefits employees from speaking freely to the department's lawyers - Government Executive

Employees were originally told they could not communicate with any attorneys at OGC even at the regional level, but the policy was subsequently loosened to allow for such engagement so long as every interaction was tracked and reported up to the senior advisor level. Regional office employees were tasked with, when interacting with regional VA counsel, recording the date of the interaction, with whom they met, the nature of the discussion and how long the interaction lasted.

Mason, the senior advisor directing the new policy, is President Trump's nominee to serve as assistant secretary for VA's Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection. VA established the office in Trump's first term as a path for employees to disclose wrongdoing and to protect those workers from retaliation, though it has [not always delivered on that promise](#).

'Running rogue'

VA's general counsel office employs more than 600 attorneys and around 900 employees in total. In an update to its website in January on the general counsel office's role, VA noted that its attorneys ensure "legally compliant implementation of VA laws, particularly those involving benefits and health care for veterans." OGC also protects "VA from litigation outcomes that inhibit efficient service to veterans" and helps oversee a "legally sound and timely claims appeals process for veterans."

OGC maintains a Benefits Law Group set up to work directly with VBA. It is not immediately clear what impact the new directive will have on that partnership.

Richard Sauber, VA's former general counsel under President Biden, said the new policy had the potential for "gumming up the works" within VBA. He saw only two potential motives for the change: to either stop VBA employees from getting legal advice—which he called a "huge negative"—or to slow down the process sufficiently so "things don't get done."

"The implication is that they have some underlying fear that legal advice that the 600 dedicated civil servants, many of whom are themselves veterans, would give would somehow not be in line with what their political views are," Sauber said.

Dave Lehmann, a private sector attorney accredited with VA to help veterans receive the benefits they have earned, said there could be drastic impacts from the new policy limiting OGC's interactions with VBA.

"They're taking VBA and essentially running it rogue outside of any legal oversight," Lehmann said.

He noted that VA's attorneys can issue precedential rulings on important benefits adjudication cases, which VBA employees then lean on to determine whether to grant veterans benefits in the future. In one example with far-reaching impacts, OGC has set the precedent that veterans qualify for benefits if a service-connected issue caused them to gain weight and being overweight in turn caused a disability.

OGC has played a key role, Lehmann added, in helping VA determine which conditions are presumed to be service connected in light of the PACT Act. That law, passed in 2022, newly presumed that veterans facing respiratory illnesses after deploying to areas that utilized burn pits were service connected.

VBA also contracts companies to conduct exams of veterans filing disability claims to help determine their eligibility. OGC works closely with VBA to provide oversight of those contracts to investigate when firms are suspected of not meeting their obligations.

The new policy follows the Trump administration recently pushing out a career attorney it had tapped to serve as the Food and Drug Administration's general counsel after she was deemed insufficiently opposed to abortion rights, which was [first reported](#) by *The New York Times*. Justice has purged lawyers from its ranks, casting aside their civil service protections.

At HHS, employees impacted by the OGC consolidation told *Government Executive* key work will now not get done. Department Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., has insisted the four remaining regional offices will have the same capacity as the 10 did previously, but the employees said that is not possible.

Impacted regions are handling close to 5,000 administrative appeals, according to one attorney now slated for removal, and are supporting the department in litigation worth billions of dollars. Oversight of nursing homes, hospitals and laboratories is expected to take a particularly hard hit, employees said, as those facilities can appeal when they are cited for violations such as failing to follow a physician's orders or not having working sprinklers. OGC then gets involved to litigate those appeals.

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VA blocks its benefits employees from speaking freely to the department's lawyers - Government Executive

It similarly plays a key role when the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services opts to revoke or suspend entities' eligibility to participate in Medicare due to fraud.

"Basically, if you know someone who is a resident in a nursing home, receives care in a hospital, or gets lab test results, be concerned," one employee said.

Another impacted staffer said HHS will now be less capable of providing oversight meant to "protect vulnerable populations."

What VBA wants to do with the data it will now collect on its OGC interactions, and why it wants to restrict access to attorneys at VA's Washington headquarters, remains unclear. The department is currently developing a plan to slash its overall workforce to fiscal 2019 levels, resulting in [cuts of up to 83,000 roles](#).

"The lawyers were really really instrumental in getting veterans their appropriate benefits and smoothing out the obstacles in the bureaucracy, so I don't really understand it," said Sauber, the former head of VA's OGC. "I can't think of a way in which this is going to benefit veterans."

VA spokesperson told *Government Executive*, "This commonsense reform will help VA avoid repeating some of the costly legal mistakes it made during the Biden Administration, such as the inexplicable decision to [pay more than \\$130 million](#) to employees who were fired for misconduct during the first Trump Administration."

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