



PRESS STATEMENT

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VCS Statement on Veterans Affairs Secretary

(Washington – March 22, 2018) – Veterans for Common Sense, a Washington, DC-based veterans organization, today released the following 500-word statement in response to current public discussion regarding the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary.

Prevent Koch Brothers Hostile Takeover of VA *Veterans for Common Sense Say VA is Worth Fixing and Saving*

The battle over the Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary is about the future of caring for the nation's veterans. On one side are powerful interests aimed at privatizing and profiteering from VA healthcare, backed by the Koch Brothers and their front organization, Concerned Veterans for America (CVA).

On the other are the nation's venerable Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) standing shoulder-to-shoulder to oppose privatization-profitteering and the injury it would inflict on our nation's already service-disabled veterans.

Recent news stories help highlight some of this. After a damaging Inspector General report emerged, VA Secretary David Shulkin, M.D., whose appointment had been confirmed by the Senate 100-0, moved quickly to fix the identified issues.

Perhaps most telling is the response by the four corners of the Congressional oversight committees. Following the "damning" IG report, their seen-it-all-before quiet response was merely to sign a joint letter — all four of them, Republicans and Democrats, House and Senate united — that amounted to a tap on the wrist and a clarion call for renewed focus caring for the nation's veterans.

Supported by the VSOs, Shulkin appeared to have crushed the coup, with professed White House support for both him and his vow to remove the conspirators from within VA. They include a former CVA leader and a Wisconsin brewery scion with no VA or healthcare management experience.

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Next, enter President Donald Trump. In a made-for-reality-TV plot twist, one news outlet reported that Trump, in his Oval Office meeting with Shulkin, interjected on speaker phone none other than pro-privatization Pete Hegseth — head of the Koch-backed CVA and of *Fox & Friends* fame.

Rumors abound that Trump may yet fire Shulkin, who has reportedly been prevented from removing any of the conspirators.

A recent *USA Today* editorial by the Executive Director of AMVETS, one of the nation's largest VSOs, makes clear the critical stakes of privatization if Trump fires the “embattled” VA Secretary in favor of the Kochs' interests, their CVA brainchild, and their privatization-profiteering that is perhaps being made more attractive by offering to save a buck — on the broken backs of service-disabled veterans.

Veterans for Common Sense publicly supported Trump's elevation and appointment of Dr. Shulkin, noting in light of privatization rumors we were “relieved”. We publicly called on the new Administration to fully fund the VA, fix VA's many challenges, and ensure veterans receive the assistance they need at the time they need it.

Many veterans believed Trump as President would improve their VA care. When we met with Secretary Shulkin in Washington before Christmas, we found him amendable to positive change for serious problems facing our nation's Gulf War veterans.

We should never stand for corruption in government. But in Washington, as in Hollywood, things are often not what they seem. Whatever the outcome of this latest scene, our service-disabled veterans are counting on the President to protect them from getting stuck with bills for denied healthcare services — which is the only way those pushing privatization will profit from their behind-the-scenes schemes for the VA.

-Anthony Hardie, National Chair & Director of Veterans for Common Sense (VCS). *Founded in 2002 by war veterans and with roots in the pragmatic ideals of Thomas Paine, VCS works to raise the voices of veterans for the betterment of current and former military service members and the nation they protect.*

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