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Whistleblower asks VA secretary: Why is retaliation still allowed?

by Eric Hannel | Aug 22, 2017, 12:35 PM



Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin was challenged Monday by a VA whistleblower who asked why he was still facing retaliation by the department, even though VA policy prohibits actions against officials who highlight problems within the agency. (AP Photo/Susan Walsh)

Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin was challenged Monday by a VA whistleblower who asked why he was still facing retaliation by the department, even though VA policy prohibits actions against officials who highlight problems within the agency.

Shulkin met with VA officials in Montana to tour the Fort Harrison facility, and later participated in a question-and-answer session. That's where Greg Chiles, a veteran and VA police officer, asked Shulkin why retaliation against him is not being stopped.

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As part of his official duties, Chiles — who had never had any previous disciplinary problems at VA — had issued a citation to a VA psychologist for driving 36 miles-per-hour in a 20-mph zone. Then, in 2014, Chiles failed a mandatory annual mental evaluation administered by that same psychologist.

Chiles told the *Washington Examiner* that the actions against him were a form of retaliation for enforcing the rules against a senior VA official, and for his complaint against that official for improperly accessing and altering his military record. Many of the psychologist's actions toward Chiles were criticized in a Dec. 12, 2016 Merit Systems Protection Board hearing, but still, Chiles said the retaliation has gotten increasingly worse.

The incident began a series of problems for Chiles, whose pay is still short each month by about \$500 due to clerical errors, and the thousands of dollars owed to him are nowhere in sight, he told the *Washington Examiner*. VA officials have also pulled his credentials, which prevents him from conducting police work, assigned him to non-police work

issuing identification cards while leaving him under police supervision, and refused to put him back in uniform until he completes an exam for unidentified reasons in Sheridan, Wyo., twelve hours away.

According to Chiles, typically, any annual or fit-for-duty exams are done in Helena, which is much closer to Fort Harrison.

Shulkin insisted to Chiles on Monday that the VA doesn't tolerate any retaliation, and recommended that Chiles contact the new Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection.

"If you haven't heard anything back, I'd like to get your information because we should be in touch with you and we do not tolerate retaliation against whistleblowers," Shulkin said, according to video of the event posted by Sen. Steve Daines, R-Mont.

Chiles asked his question about **21 minutes** into the Q&A session.

Chiles, who submitted an 84-page disclosure to that office, as well as to Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., in May, received no response from either office until he called the White House hotline in early August. Within a week, he received an email from a Human Resources specialist in VA's Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection asking him to forward documentation about the situation, according to Chiles.

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As for his direct conversation with Shulkin, Chiles told the *Washington Examiner*, "I don't feel like I got through to him." According to a second VA employee familiar with the retaliation against Chiles who was also in the meeting, the real test is what VA does moving forward.

"I'm interested to see if the issues are addressed," the employee indicated.

Eric Hannel, previously the staff director for the Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations at the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, is a Marine Corps combat veteran and freelance investigative writer.

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