

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 18, 2018

The Honorable Michael J. Missal  
Inspector General  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Office of Inspector General  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Mr. Missal:

We write to request that the Office of the Inspector General investigate recent reports of undue influence by outside individuals on policy and personnel decisions at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). We are deeply disturbed by reports that VA senior leadership is acting at the direction of unqualified members of the President's inner circle. We request that you immediately conduct an investigation into the conduct of VA officials in order to detect and deter any instances of criminal activity, waste, abuse, and mismanagement.

Last month, ProPublica published a shocking investigation that alleged three individuals—Marvel Entertainment CEO Ike Perlmutter, physician Dr. Bruce Moskowitz, and attorney Marc Sherman—are the “shadow rulers” of VA. These individuals, commonly referred to as the “Mar-a-Lago crowd”, were not confirmed by the Senate and lack relevant government or veteran-specific experience to justify the level of engagement they exercise over VA contracts, policies, or personnel decisions. We are deeply disturbed to learn of the extent of communication between these individuals and VA employees. Reports that VA officials flew to Mar-a-Lago for in-person meetings and maintained daily correspondence with the trio on major policy and personnel decisions are not only inappropriate – they are potentially dangerous and could have real ramifications for veterans in years to come. These reports provide sufficient evidence of corruption and cronyism to warrant an investigation.

The allegations outlined in ProPublica's investigation indicate VA's failure to abide by rules and regulations governing agency interactions with outside individuals. The Federal Advisory Committee Act of 1972 permits agencies to consult with outside experts on policy matters, however, it requires specific actions to ensure transparency such as listing all meetings in the Federal Register, opening meetings to the public, as well as disclosing meeting minutes. As many interactions between the “Mar-a-Lago crowd” were conducted behind closed doors, we ask that you review of any potential violations of the Federal Advisory Committee Act of 1972. Similarly, we ask that you investigate any potential violations of the Federal Records Act of 1950 as senior VA political appointees purportedly provided their personal contact information for members of the “Mar-a-Lago crowd” to easily reach them.

We request that you take action to ensure that no individual influences VA policies and operations without transparency or accountability. Without clarity on potential ethical violations, we cannot be certain that VA is protected from all improper interference.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL  
United States Senate



SHERROD BROWN  
United States Senate