

Duckworth & Hassan: VA Inspector General must investigate potential legal & ethics violations at Trump's VA

November 27 2018 2:23 PM

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senators Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) and Maggie Hassan (D-NH) applauded the U.S. Government Accountability Office's (GAO) [decision](#) to probe whether several wealthy friends of Donald Trump improperly influenced policy decisions at VA, including its electronic health records modernization project as a [ProPublica investigation](#) revealed earlier this year. [The Senators also reiterated their call](#) for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of the Inspector General (IG) to launch a full investigation into how Trump's friends, who are not government employees and have little relevant experience, have inappropriately dictated a number of VA actions and used the department to advance their own business and personal interests. The VA IG had previously told Duckworth and Hassan they will evaluate whether VA officials inappropriately used private email to conduct government business in response to Duckworth and Hassan's request for an investigation.

"I'm glad the GAO is going to investigate whether several of Donald Trump's wealthy friends inappropriately used their relationships with the President to interfere with VA policy," said Senator Duckworth. "The VA Inspector General must also investigate the full breadth of these allegations as well. The American people need to know if these Mar-a-Lago members used VA to advance their personal and business interests and what the consequences were if VA leaders prioritized the requests of unelected political advisors over the best interests of our nation's Veterans."

"Allowing the President's friends at Mar-a-Lago to make decisions at the VA is an insult to the brave and selfless service of our veterans," Senator Hassan said. "I am pleased that the Government Accountability Office has opened an investigation into how the President's friends, who have little relevant experience and are not government employees, were able to wield such power over decisions that impact veterans in New Hampshire and across America. There is far more work to do to ensure that our veterans

get the care and support that they have earned, and I won't stop pushing for answers because our veterans deserve nothing less.”

In August, Senators Duckworth and Hassan asked the IG to determine whether VA leadership violated any federal law, policy, or their ethical obligation to Veterans. Specifically, they asked the IG to review:

- Whether VA officials inappropriately shared procurement sensitive information with non-governmental employees with no legitimate need for the information, resulting in the delay of contract awards and costing the federal government additional money – and if those non-government employees had financial interests in the companies of the contracts being discussed or in its competitors.
- Whether VA officials misused taxpayer funds by taking multiple trips with the sole purpose of meeting with non-elected political advisors – or, if the trips and lodging were not paid by taxpayers, whether the trips violated federal rules on accepting gifts.
- Whether senior Trump political appointees violated The Federal Records Act by using their personal email addresses to receive direction and guidance on VA policy and decisions from Trump's wealthy friends.
- Whether then-VA Chief of Staff Peter O'Rourke violated federal civil service protections by communicating with non-governmental individuals regarding several VA civil servants and a contractor assigned to a VA project.

After ProPublica's allegations first emerged, Duckworth [wrote](#) to VA Secretary Robert Wilkie urging him to sever ties with the so-called “Mar-a-Lago Crowd.” Additionally, she urged him to replace several of the President's political appointees at the VA who have caused significant dysfunction in the department and to re-examine every action undertaken by former VA Acting Secretary Peter O'Rourke to ensure it aligned with the VA's mission.

Duckworth served 23 years in the Reserve Forces and still receives her own healthcare services through VA. Since being wounded in combat, Duckworth has made it her mission to advocate for America's servicemembers and Veterans.