

The adVocAte

<https://www.avaHo.org/avaHo-advocacy/>



May 2025



Your Advocacy Team

In this Issue:

- **What To Expect During the Trump Administration's First 100 Days**
- **US Rep Debbie Wasserman Schultz Speaks to AVAHO Advocacy Committee**
- **President Trump Assembles Health Team**
- **VA Secretary Nominee Had Strong Senate Committee Hearing**
- **NIH and Biomedical Funding Jeopardized Under Current Political Environment**
- **Employee Testimonials**



01/06

Send your representative
pre-drafted letters ([click here](#))

*Please note there 4 individuals letters with
more to be added soon!

What To Expect During the Trump Administration's First 100 Days

The first 100 days of a new presidential administration are often called the “honeymoon phase.” Presidents generally receive a boost in approval ratings immediately following their inauguration and can achieve some immediate wins through Executive Orders (EO). Executive orders are edicts from a president to the executive branch on how to operate the federal government. Not as powerful as laws—which are passed by Congress and signed by the president—but these orders do provide insight into an administration’s priorities. A president can enact or rescind an executive order at any time and are common during the beginning of a president’s term. Executive orders, however, can be challenged in court and struck down if a judge deems it beyond the powers of the presidency, contradicted by federal law, or is unconstitutional.

Instead of having to fight the US Congress, a president can make significant changes from their predecessors’ policies with the stroke of a pen. After the easier policy wins have been accomplished through executive orders, struggles with the Congress can bring negative media attention and approval ratings can start to dip. While Republicans do control both the US House of Representatives and the US Senate, these are narrow margins. In the House, Republicans hold a slim majority with 218 to 215 seats, and in the Senate, Republicans hold leadership control with a 53 to 47 lead.

President Donald Trump began his first 100 days after the inauguration on January 20th, with some controversial executive orders. Just hours after being sworn in, President Trump withdrew the United States from the World Health Organization (WHO). He also signed an executive order with wide sweeping categories that reflected his political agenda, many impacting the scope of the federal government and healthcare.

The first 100 days of the new administration will likely be filled with economic priorities. The government is still undergoing budgetary negotiations, and the executive branch is in constant contact with the legislative branch over pending bills. During President Franklin D. Roosevelt term, the phrase “first 100 days” was coined to set benchmarks. It continues to be a measure that an administration might mark in its own agenda.

US Rep Debbie Wasserman Schultz Speaks to the AVAHO Advocacy Committee

As the 119th US Congress was sworn in and the slim Republican majority will force bipartisan support for any major legislation, the committee structure is falling into place with new chairs and ranking members claiming plum positions. One such leader is US Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL), who remains the Ranking Member of the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Subcommittee on the powerful House Appropriations Committee.



As a cancer survivor herself, the Congresswoman is vocal about prevention and treatment. In 2009, Representative Wasserman Schultz introduced the EARLY Act, a piece of legislation designed to increase breast cancer education and awareness. The EARLY Act became law as part of the Affordable Care Act in 2010. Wasserman Schultz also worked with Republican Congresswoman Renee Elmers to write and pass the PALS Act, which helps increase young women's access to mammograms.

Congresswoman Wasserman Schultz leadership on the Appropriations Committee has allowed her to make history as the first-ever woman to Chair the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Subcommittee. As Ranking Member, she has worked across party lines to provide the necessary resources for service members and Veterans.

In a February press release, Representative Wasserman Schulz wrote that “firing 1,000 VA staff will clearly do nothing to better help serve our veterans, instead instilling chaos and uncertainty in a system that is already short staffed and complicated to navigate.” Her concerns were reiterated in a meeting with AVAHO's Advocacy Committee and staff. Pledging to work with the Association, the Congresswoman was eager to learn about AVAHO's members and their professional challenges.

During this session, she also brought up funding freezes, data security, and staffing at the VA. She reiterated her support by saying that “many in the workforce provide essential services to our veterans, which is why the blanket rescission of job offers and the refusal to fill openings is short-sighted and will ultimately require veterans to wait longer to receive the lifesaving benefits they have earned and deserve.” Finally, she said “there remains significant confusion over VA's telework and remote work policy. To reach more veterans, especially in rural areas...and I am concerned that it will have a negative impact on veteran care.”

It was a candid, and refreshing, conversation. This kind of proactive outreach by AVAHO to engage elected officials is part of a coordinated effort to educate decision-makers on the role of the Association's members throughout the VA.

President Trump Assembles Health Team

President Donald Trump has assembled his Cabinet to run various agencies in the federal government. After assuming office on January 20th, the president nominated a number of appointments to run important departments and agencies, such as the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Nominees have to be confirmed by the US Senate before taking office.



Environmental lawyer and former presidential candidate, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., was tapped as the new administration's Secretary of Health and Human Services. Kennedy has also faced some controversy for his comments on medical issues. Despite these remarks, Kennedy was confirmed as the 26th Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services on February 13, 2025.

Dr. Jay Battacharya, a professor at the Stanford School of Medicine, was chosen to head the NIH. On November 26, 2024, President-Elect Donald Trump nominated Jay Bhattacharya, M.D., Ph.D., as the 18th NIH director. The nomination awaits confirmation by the U.S. Senate. On January 22, 2025, Matthew J. Memoli, M.D., M.S. was named the acting NIH director. The NIH is a part of the Department of Health and Human Services.



Former House Representative Doug Collins was nominated to be Secretary of Veterans Affairs. During his confirmation hearing, Rep. Collins stated his support for the PACT Act, which was signed into law by President Biden. The PACT Act expanded support for veterans who were exposed to toxins during their service. Secretary Collins was sworn in as the 12th secretary of Veterans Affairs on February 5, 2025. He completed a 2008-2009 deployment to Iraq while stationed at Balad Air Base and remains a colonel in the Air Force Reserve. Previously, Secretary Collins served as a U.S. Representative for Georgia's Ninth Congressional District from 2013-2021. While he is a public servant, attorney, and practicing military chaplain, he proudly claims to remain foremost a husband to Lisa and proud father.



Several important vacancies remain across the federal government that directly oversee healthcare. In the coming months these will likely be filled to complete the president's agenda.

VA Secretary Nominee Has Strong Senate Committee Hearing

Former US House Representative Doug Collins was picked to be Secretary of Veterans Affairs and was confirmed by the Senate. During his confirmation hearing in the US Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, Secretary Collins stated his support for the PACT Act, which was previously signed into law, and the health and wellbeing of the armed forces and America's Veterans.

Secretary Collins also addressed concerns that there would be significant cuts to the Department of Veterans Affairs. He responded to a question by Senator Angus King (I-ME) about potential budget cuts proposed in Project 2025 by saying, "We're not going to balance budgets on the backs of veterans." He also emphasized the importance of the work of the VA. In his testimony Collins said, "we will not shy away from challenges," saying issues that "like homelessness and suicide prevention, electronic health record modernization, and shrinking the department's claims backlog. And we will not stop until we succeed on behalf of the men and women who have worn the uniform."

Secretary Collins also asserted his willingness to work with Congress. He told the members of the committee, "as a former congressman, I know success requires your help and support as well as that of your congressional colleagues. I want to strengthen VA so it works better for America's heroes, and I will embrace your oversight and seek your counsel as we work together to do just that."

Secretary Collins received bipartisan support during his hearing. Chair of the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs Jerry Moran (R-KS) said that Secretary Collins "knows firsthand the benefits and challenges of military service, and many issues facing veterans and their families." Ranking Member Blumenthal (D-CT) stated that "I really appreciate your candor and I look forward to a working relationship where we are always candid with each other".

Secretary Collins was advanced out of committee favorably by a vote of 18-1. Senator Hirono (D-HI) was the only nay vote. Secretary Collins was confirmed by the entire Senate by a vote of 77-23. He was sworn into office on February 5, 2025.

Click [here](#) to watch the full confirmation hearing.

05/06

Click [HERE](#) to get involved!

NIH and Biomedical Funding Jeopardized Under Current Political Environment

For more than 30 years, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has been referred to as the crown jewel in the federal government's commitment to research, science, and clinical trials. The Institute has enjoyed overwhelming bipartisan support with annual increases in its budget to help find treatments and cures for chronic, acute, and rare diseases...and cancer specifically, through the National Cancer Institute (NCI), has enjoyed a largess above all others.

But with the recent spate of executive orders slashing federal agencies, including the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), there is great concern about the implications on patient-centered care and safety. Access and affordability have driven incredible advances in biomedical research as clinical trials have allowed those otherwise unable to benefit to participate in life altering treatment protocols. Much of this is in jeopardy through the Administration's priority to make deep cuts across the federal government, with no area being spared.

The current budget proposal is to cap indirect costs for the NIH at 15 percent. This will have a negative impact on hiring, research, and patient care. It will also reduce grants that originate at the Institute but are distributed across the country to medical, university, and private institutions that are engaged in similar endeavors. In recent years, NIH has provided about \$36 billion in grants across the research and health field. The freeze put into effect by the Trump Administration shortly after the inauguration stopped about 16,000 grants from being fully funded and halted \$1.5 billion to that research. Since that time, through significant advocacy in the medical, health, and patient communities, the restrictions have been lifted, but are still in limbo. Still, there is more uncertainty in how the US Congress, during this fiscal year crunch will allocate to the NIH, and the NCI, as the politics of economics weigh heavy in a contentious timeline to pass a budget.

VA Employee Testimonials

The Association of VA Hematology/Oncology (AVAHO) is steadfast in its commitment to advocate for Veterans, ensuring they receive the highest quality of cancer care they rightly deserve. Recognizing the unique healthcare challenges faced by those who have served, AVAHO is advocating to support initiatives to improve and increase access to cancer care. We are particularly interested in hearing from Veterans who have been directly affected by the recent VA reduction in force (RIF). We are here to be your voice and stand as your advocate. Sharing your stories is essential in helping legislators grasp the impact of these detrimental changes and the challenges they create.

Please note: this system will not track your IP address or any other identifying information. AVAHO assures you will have fully anonymity if you wish to have it.

[If you have a story to share, you can do so by clicking here!](#)

Elizabeth Hansen PharmD, Chair, VISN 12 PBM
David Eplin PharmD, VISN 10 CRH,
Emily Fasciana RD, Wilkes-Barre VAMC
Shruti Trehan MD, Medical Oncology, Miami VAMC
Michael Chang MD, Radiation Oncology, Richmond VAMC
Cindy Bowman RN, Bay Pines VAHCS

Committee Members

Cheryl Cherry RN, NOLA VA
Tony Quang MD, Radiation Oncology, Long Beach VAMC
Erin Bayley MD
Mariam Chapman, Veteran
Janice Schwartz AVAHO Education Director
Julie Lawson AVAHO Executive Director
Alec Stone AVAHO Advocacy Consultant