

VA News August 2019

Harry Walters passed away on 19 August in Florida. Walters was the Director of the Department of Veterans Affairs, then known as the Veterans Administration, under President Reagan. He served as Director from 1983 to 1986. "America lost a true patriot last week who never stopped fighting for Veterans," said current VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. Walters, a West Point graduate who served in the Army from 1959 to 1963, once said his leadership of the VA gave him an even deeper appreciation for our nation's heroes. He was later able to show that appreciation as president of the Desert Storm Homecoming Foundation in 1991, which organized a parade in Washington, D.C. to celebrate the U.S. victory in the Gulf War. "Harry liked to note that motivating spirit behind the foundation was, 'of the troops, by the troops, for the troops,' which showed his love for those who have worn the uniform," Wilkie said. "His service will never be forgotten, nor will his clear-eyed view of this nation's debt to our soldiers and Veterans."

Now, let's fast forward to today. I must comment on a recent VA related story reported by several news organizations, including CBS, CNN, and Stars and Strips. Apparently Trump has made it known that Ike Perlmutter, Marc Sherman and Bruce Moskowitz are to tell the Department of Veterans Affairs what they should do. None of the three have served in the military nor been elected to any public office. None have been confirmed by the Senate. Pro Publica, under the Freedom of Information Act requested and received hundreds of pages of documents including emails, calendar, expense reports and other records that show how the three outside individuals wield vast influence over the VA. The documents range from February 2017 to April 2018. All of the documents are on-line and I've reviewed several of them. An example is that Moskowitz who is a doctor to very wealthy clients sent messages recommending that the VA be privatized. Perlmutter is chairman of Marvel Entertainment and Sherman is a wealthy lawyer. Top officials in the VA refer to them as the 'Mar-a-Lago Crowd'. The Mar-a-Lago Crowd spoke with VA officials daily, the documents show, reviewing all manner of policy and personnel decisions. They prodded the VA to start new programs, and officials travelled to Mar-a-Lago at taxpayer expense to hear their views. "Everyone has to go down and kiss the ring," a former administration official said. Civilian advisory groups are not new, I served on one for the VA about 15 years ago. However, it was organized under Federal guidelines and was very transparent. Our Veterans deserve better.