

WASHINGTON, Oct. 11, 2013 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- American Federation of Government Employees National Veterans Affairs Council President Alma Lee

today issued the following statement regarding the lockout of Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) employees:

"Some of our lawmakers should be ashamed of themselves. They have allowed for the lockout of vital public servants for now 11 days. Added to the hundreds of thousands of employees who have been sent home are 7,000 Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) workers who assist in the processing of veterans' benefits claims.

"Historically, we have taken great pride in our ability to serve our nation's heroes who have worn the uniform and fought valiantly for our freedoms. To look at where we are today, with politicians more interested in political posturing than providing support to our veterans, it is an unspeakable travesty. With a record-high claims backlog and more of our soldiers leaving military service, we need to make it our top priority to ensure our service to America's veterans is fully funded and operational. We cannot do that under this current government shutdown.

"The furlough of thousands of VBA workers means claims processing will be delayed, quality review teams will not be on the job to ensure that claims are completed accurately, appeals are not being processed, and there is no access to in-person or over the phone consultations at VBA regional offices. In many cases, veterans cannot access VA health care and other VA services, or receive their preference for federal employment until their benefits are awarded. In the wake of this shutdown, education and pension call centers are also closed, hurting veterans who are looking for assistance with their GI Bill benefits, and low income veterans and widows.

"Our elected leaders must end this lockout now. Our employees want to be on the job providing service to our veterans and reducing this backlog. AFGE VA activists from health care workers to cemetery employees will continue to hold rallies and sound the alarm on the mockery that is being made of our legislative system. At the rate we are going, those who have escaped this round of furloughs will be the next ones to have their jobs on the chopping block. We are all touched by someone who's been impacted by this shutdown. The time is now to reopen the government and put all public servants back to work."

*The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) is the largest federal employee union, representing 670,000 workers in the federal government and the government of the District of Columbia*

*. AFGE's National Veterans Affairs Council represents 210,000 employees within the Department of Veterans Affairs. For the latest AFGE news and information, follow us on*

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