

KINS COMMUNITY COMMENT (442-5744)

This is Ron Pierre for Community Comment.

Over the last three years, I have been working in a Department of Defense volunteer program with service members and veterans. This program is directly connected to not only military people, but it is also connected to employers and job creators. As the California Director of Ombudsman services for the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve(ESGR), the scope of these efforts focuses on work place mediation. The California program, that I manage, is one of the largest DOD volunteer programs in the country. In addition, I talk every day with California employers large and small from San Diego to Crescent City. In my State Director's role, I also interface with government bureaucrats at all levels. Since the infamous sequester was enacted and budget woes have plagued every level of government, working with these agencies has taken on an entire new customer service face of with a new litany of excuses as to why something can't be done or why customer services can't be performed. ~~I think I even heard in one~~ conversation that, "the dog ate my work schedule so I can't talk to you right now." I find it ironic that our free volunteer mediation services are some of the most cost effective operations under the Department of Defense, yet when we deal with paid government staff there just doesn't appear to be enough time to work an issue involving veteran or reserve component service members. Some of the biggest offenders I have dealt with recently include: the VA, California State government, EDD, county, and local municipalities.

In many situations, I have been referred to consultants who have been the "out-sourced" decision element for many of these government agencies. The decision-making processes have been deferred using budget or sequestration excuses for an absence of individual decision making accountability. Don't take the words of a community commentary. Call DMV and try and resolve an issue speaking with a customer service representative. Same- same with the veteran's administration related to evaluation, status, or benefits. I have worked up the hierarchy of many government organizations to resolve work place issues as a volunteer ombudsman, only to end up with a consultant and not a government employee or an elected

official ultimately deciding an issue. It sounds and looks like the "full employment" for consultants and staffers.

~~After one especially frustrating day, I asked my wife, "Does anyone in government make a decision anymore?" Her answer affirmed that the lack of decision-making capability all levels of government demonstrates lack of leadership, and the attitude to save your backside in order to get re-elected. It is truly government decision by consultancy and special interest-----not by leadership. Adding to the many government leadership vacuums, the entrenched staffs, strap hangers, bureaucracies, and consultants are enforcing regulations and enacting policies designed for government agencies not customer service. The words public service have a whole new meaning.~~

Last month, one day before I was slated to go to Lithuania as a DOD nonpaid volunteer, a Sacramento bureaucrat told me she had to approve my trip, and because of sequestration she didn't have enough time to complete the required processes. After a brief and heated discussion about customer service.... the bureaucrat was enlightened. I left the next day for Lithuania.

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